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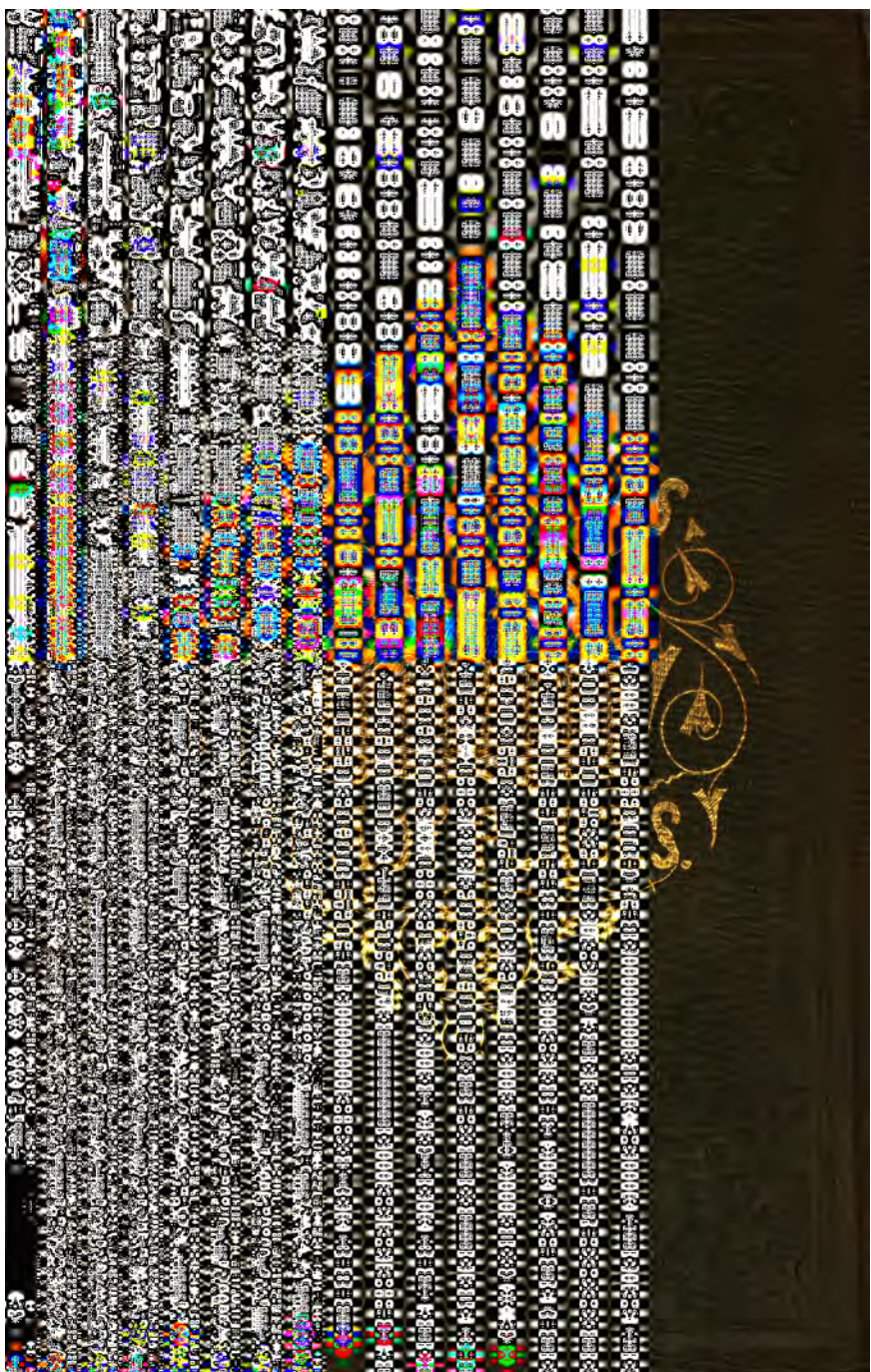
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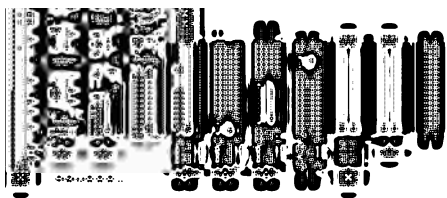
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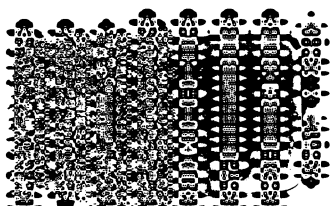
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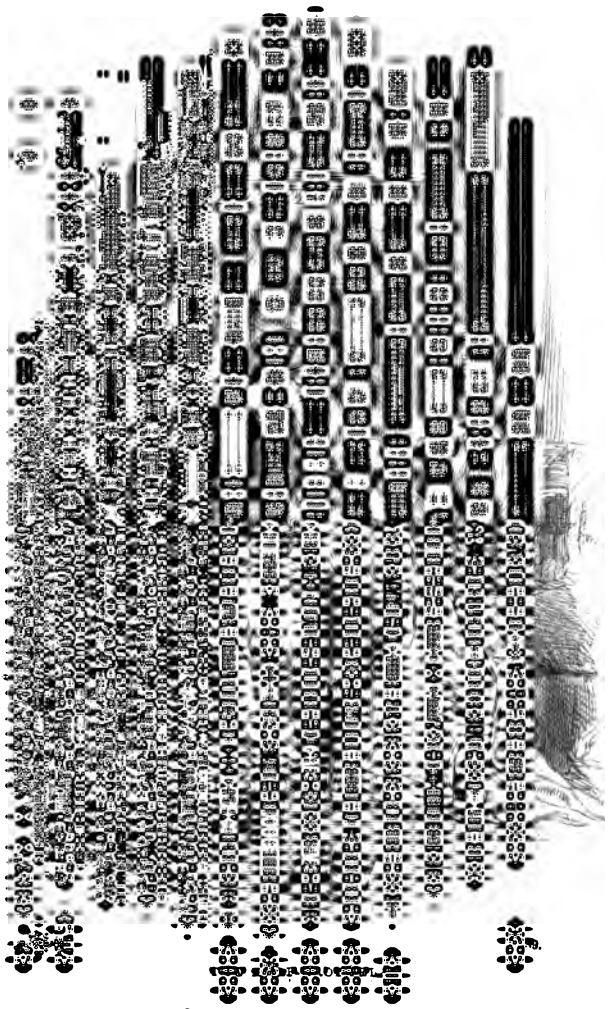
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STRAY LEAVES
FROM SHADY PLACES.

BY

MRS. NEWTON CROSLAND,

(LATE CAMILLA TOULMIN.)

AUTHOR OF "LYDIA: A WOMAN'S BOOK;" "PARTNERS FOR
LIFE," ETC. ETC.



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TO

HER MUCH-VALUED FRIENDS,

MR. AND MRS. FRANCIS BENNOCH,

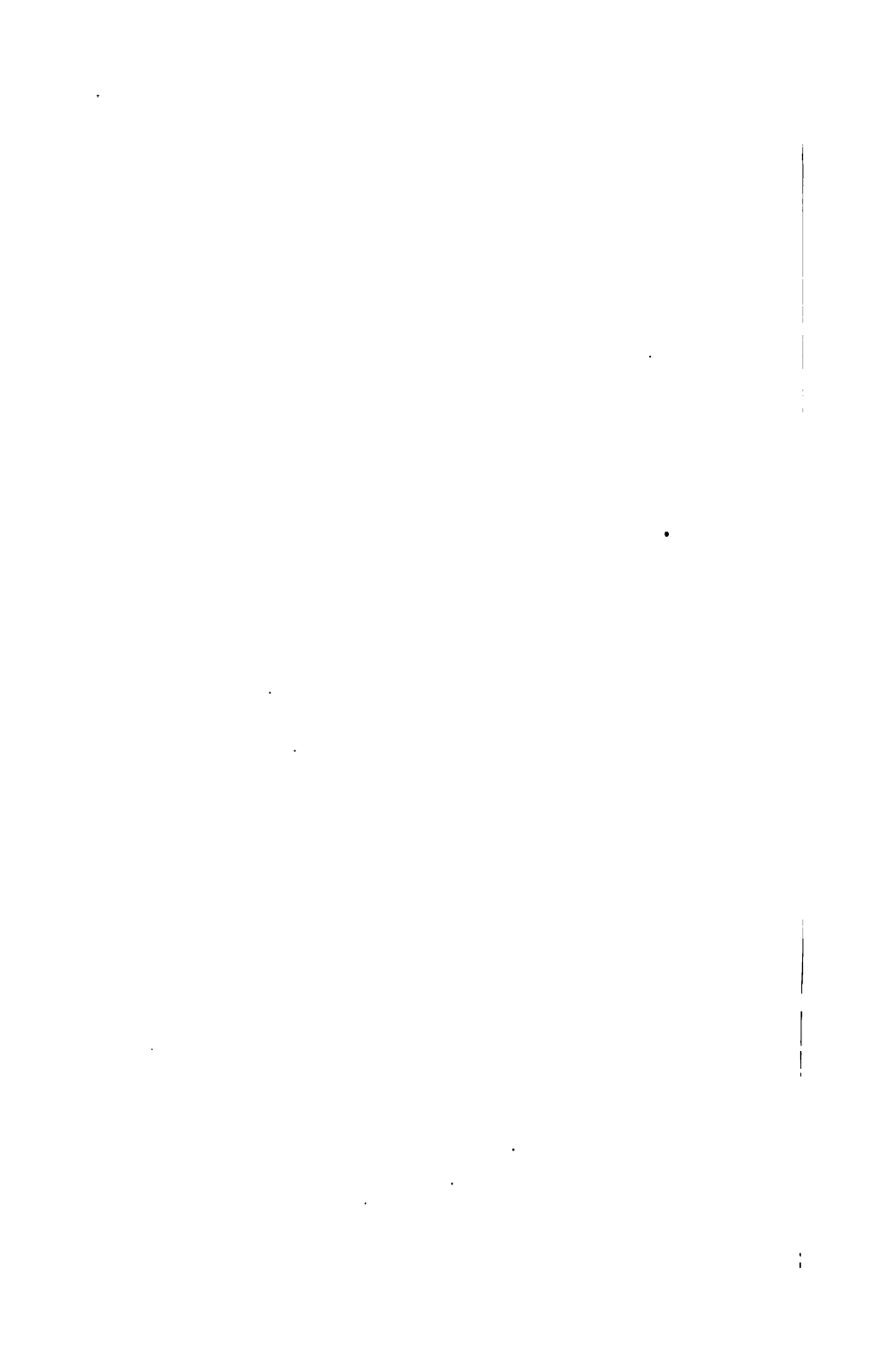
OF BLACKHEATH PARK,

THE FOLLOWING "STRAY LEAVES"

ARE INSCRIBED,

AS A SLIGHT AND IMPERFECT TOKEN OF THE AUTHOR'S

SINCERE ESTEEM AND REGARD.



GOLD;

OR,

THE HALF-BROTHERS.

CHAPTER I.

“How can we live without knowing life? Now it is only known on one condition: to suffer, work, and be poor; or else, to make one's self poor in sympathy and heart, and willingly participate in toil and suffering.”—MICHELET.

It was a close and oppressive day towards the end of August, when in the drawing-room of a large house, situated in one of the half fashionable streets of London, three persons were assembled: all were attired in mourning; and the lady bore the insignia of widowhood. Mrs. Sefton was really some three or four years above forty; but her *petite* and slender figure, her fair complexion, small regular features, and their pervading expression of goodness and gentleness had combined to retain for her a much more youthful appearance than is usual at that age. Standing beside her, with one arm leaning on the marble chimney-piece, and the other

hand placed from time to time protectingly on her shoulder, was a young man, of about one or two-and-twenty. Trevor Sefton had soft grey eyes, like his mother, though now they were dilated, and looked dark from ill-repressed indignation; and his waving hair was of the same sunny brown as the smooth braids which were just visible beneath the widow's coif. The imperishable beauty of a fine and noble expression was also his, with a symmetrical figure above the common height.

It would be difficult to imagine a more striking contrast than that afforded by his elder and half brother, who sat with some papers before him near a table opposite. He was a short and somewhat thick-set man, of about five-and-thirty, bearing about him all the characteristics which, on a superficial glance, we are accustomed to call "common-place." And yet, on a narrower inspection, there was a degree of shrewdness in the small dark eye, and of hardness about the thin compressed lips, which, taken with the general outline of head and face, proclaimed a cold, selfish, remorseless being, of a class which, it is to be hoped, for the honour of human nature, is not common.

"Certainly," said he; "certainly, Mrs. Sefton; if you choose to remain here another week or two, there cannot be the slightest objection to your doing so. The remark I made, and which your son has taken up so hastily, was not meant to offend, I assure you. But the fact is, I thought you would

wish to meet the change in your circumstances as speedily as possible, by at once curtailing your expenses, and reducing your style of living to your narrower income. Besides, you are aware I intend selling off this old rickety furniture almost immediately." And, as he spoke, he looked round with no slight contempt on the faded curtains and antiquated appointments, which told of a lengthened and constant service.

Mrs. Sefton also gazed, though mournfully, on objects which, if not associated with positive happiness, were at least endeared to her by youthful recollections and the memory of maternal affection.

"Mother," said Trevor Sefton, in the deep voice of strong emotion, "let us leave the house directly. I would not have you indebted another night for such hospitality, even to your husband's son—my father's heir. But Charles—Charles Sefton," he added, approaching the table, "it is necessary for my mother's sake that we clearly and exactly understand our real position."

The dark eye of the elder brother drooped for a moment, as he replied, "I have said I will allow Mrs. Sefton a hundred a year."

"You mean to say," replied the other, with a calm but withering scorn, "that after having robbed my mother of the provision—mean as it was—intended by our father, you will place her at the head of your pension list, as *the* object *par excellence* of your most munificent charity?"

"Call my proposal what you please," returned he, with the meekness of a martyr; "I suppose she must live."

"I wonder you see the necessity."

"Brother, you would be witty; but you only plagiarise."

Trevor Sefton struck the floor sharply with his heel, for he was stung by the imperturbable coolness of the other, and for once could not control his temper; and then he rang the bell with that impetuous touch which is sure, in the generality of establishments, to bring a speedy answer.

"Send your mistress's maid here, if you please; and order the carriage round in an hour," said he to the liveried servant who appeared.

His first impulse had been to send for some hackney conveyance; the second to uphold his mother's dignity to the last.

"Here, dear mamma, is Simpson," he continued, as the lady's maid entered the room; "will you give her instructions about packing your wardrobe?"

Unconsciously to herself the widow was comforted by the decided and almost cheerful tones of her son: and she seemed, by the look of tenderness she cast upon him as she yielded to his request, to thank him now and for ever for assuming the part of adviser and protector, that son who but a few weeks before would scarcely have formed a day's engagement without asking her advice and sanction!

Mr. Sefton, the father of the half-brothers, had been a wealthy stockbroker, and one of those individuals whose lives are recorded as a sort of pendant to that of Whittington or Guy, by people who see only virtue in worldly success, and know not that shrewdness and cunning, for a time, may ape some higher qualities. For many years he had been a person of sufficient importance, especially "on 'Change," to boast that he had come up to London with half-a-crown only in his pocket; hinting, in his autobiographical reminiscences, at the facility and enjoyment with which a prudent youth may live on seven shillings a week, and the certainty that Prudence—the one cardinal virtue which, in his opinion, incorporated every other—must lead to wealth, his sole idea of happiness.

Of course, his only conception of suffering was what Carlyle calls the "curious hell of not making money." His narrow mind had been narrowed yet further by circumstances; by the worldly success which had followed his careful policy through the different phases of life—from the time that the half-clerk, half-errand-boy of a dingy counting-house had proved himself a "great arithmetician," to the days when his name was good for tens of thousands. He had married, early in life, the mother of his elder son, the daughter of a griping and unscrupulous trader—a man whose kindred spirit had enabled him to foresee and chuckle over their—as he called it—prosperous future. The

small fortune he received with his first wife formed the nucleus of Mr. Sefton's future wealth; but she was a self-willed shrew, who visited on him the pains and penalties a vixen alone can inflict. And when death released him from this bondage, he, in his turn, revenged himself for the wrongs of her temper, by enacting the part of tyrant to the gentle nature which Fortune conferred on him in the person of his second wife.

How Mary Anne Norton, the young and gently nurtured, the gifted and the generous, ever became this second wife is one of those inscrutable mysteries beyond the power of human ingenuity to unravel. That the bride was portionless, and Mr. Sefton wealthy, had nothing to do with the matter, for she was not one to sell herself for gold or station. No; there must have been the common story of investing an image of clay with the attributes of an ideal—that every-day delusion from which the victim is sure, sooner or later, to be awakened.

Hers had been for long years that worse than helot bondage, the doom of being indissolubly yoked to an inferior nature; inferior in its moral qualities and perceptions I mean, for equality or unison of intellect is of much less importance in our close and home connections. As is ever the case in such unions, the lower character, utterly incapable of comprehending the thoughts, the feelings, the springs of action which moved the loftier mind, grew more and more suspicious and tyrannical as

years rolled on, till whatever bonds of regard had once bound them, seemed link by link to have fallen away. The void in Mrs. Sefton's heart, however, had been amply filled by her son, her only child, in whom all the strong and deep and holy affections of her soul were concentrated. Worthy was he of his mother's love;—but better let his actions speak for him than describe what he was.

In due proportion, as the mother and son were blessed by their mutual affection—the result of their being congenial characters infinitely more than of the sacred tie between them—did Mr. Sefton lavish his favour and regard on *his* first-born. And this was natural: they too had congenial tastes, opinions, and pursuits; and though one does not like to use the word affection as existing between two such selfish, worldly, unscrupulous beings, it is hard to find the exact term which might apply to the relations between them. If it were not grief Charles Sefton felt at his father's death, it was the nearest approach to that emotion he was capable of experiencing; and this, too, though he came into the possession of houses and lands, and the fine business, which, however, he had really, though not nominally, managed for half a dozen years. Truly there was some fragment of a heart in his bosom, as there is, be sure, in the most worthless and degraded of human beings, if we only knew how to get at and touch the spring which opens to better things.

When Trevor Sefton accused his brother of having robbed the widow, the facts were these :— During the lingering illness which preceded their father's death, he had had the sole control over his affairs ; had dictated, there is little doubt, and superintended the execution of his will, and the very moderate—not to say mean—provision awarded to Trevor and his mother was made to depend on securities of that fluctuating nature that a change in the “ money market ” had rendered them utterly worthless. But the will was so carefully and precisely worded, and so legally executed, that there was no redress. Hence their destitution ; hence the scene I have endeavoured to depict.

As soon as Mrs. Sefton had left the drawing-room, Trevor took up his hat. He went to seek a lodging for himself and his mother. A really great mind always rises to meet great occasions when they present themselves, and this was assuredly one of those epochs in life which demand a heroism—though silent and enduring, rather than active—greater and more real than that which is often noised to the world, and glitters afterwards on the page of history. Trevor Sefton took a clear but rapid survey of his position ; and his conscience approved of the line he was pursuing. His mother *must* for the present accept the “ bounty ” offered by his elder brother. He was not yet sufficiently advanced in his profession, that of medicine, to earn one guinea by it ; but he was thankful to Provi-

dence that the fees for lectures and all preliminary expenses necessary to the completion of his medical education, had been already paid. He felt that he was starting fair in the race; he was passionately attached to the study of anatomy and medicine, and he had the just ambition of becoming a benefactor to his fellow-creatures through his noble, and—reverently be it spoken—godlike profession.

Now was there another earnest hope and desire woven with this long-cherished one—namely, to be the support and solace of his adored mother. Meanwhile, the first step was to secure a respectable home, though with due regard to their narrow income. This was done, without journeying very far, and without much difficulty. He engaged the second floor of a neat house, in a quiet street. To be sure, he might have had a “parlour” for the same money that he was to pay, and it is a word which sounds somewhat finer. But Trevor Sefton had already learned one of the most important lessons in the world—namely, to eschew shams of all sorts—to be, and not to care for the seeming. The second floor was more airy, and at the same time more secluded; and then, to crown all, there was a little third room quite large enough for his own bed-chamber, and it would be such a comfort to be near his mother. Had he taken the “parlours,” she would have slept down stairs, and he far away up an attic. Now, there would be but a thin wall between them. They could speak from one room to another, he was sure;

and so one idea led on to another, till he pictured himself "petting"—there is no other word so expressive—petting his mother, even as she had petted him from childhood upwards. Now waiting upon her with lover-like—no, more constant assiduity than that; and now fulfilling not a few of the duties of a lady's maid.

Very silly,—perhaps some readers will say! More like the thoughts of a fond and foolish girl than that of a brave man. Is it so? Think again, good people. For my own part, I never knew a man—worthy to be called a man—who had not a great deal of what is thought to be woman's nature mingled in his composition.

Few people are in London in August who can escape from it; witness the closed up-houses and deserted haunts; and I have sometimes thought that the narrow streets, which do furnish ample shade, are even preferable, at such a season, to the squares of "pretension," with their dusty trees, and sickly flowers, and smoke-begrimed sparrows. Well, there was a good deal of shade in the narrow, quiet street where Mrs. Sefton and her son were domiciled; and, all things considered, their apartments were more comfortable than they could have expected. There was a secret essence, however, which they did not pause to analyse—that, nevertheless, had a great deal to do in the matter. Perfect love and perfect freedom will make a very rude home a happy one.

The season of the year, too, when "every one" was out of town, prevented a great deal of prying curiosity on the part of butterfly acquaintances, and the widow had time to select some two or three friends from the throng, of that rare quality which endures the test of adversity. Trevor, meanwhile, indulged more than one project which was to add to their narrow means; and really, as the days shortened and autumn glided into early winter, it was surprising how cheerful and how apparently reconciled to reverse of fortune they became.

Mrs. Sefton knew that a great portion of the house in which they dwelt was occupied by a family of the name of Clifford, a widow and three daughters; but it was reserved for an accident to bring about an acquaintance between them. What she knew of them previously to this event was not altogether in their favour. It was seldom that many days passed over without the shrill, shrewish tones of the elder lady's voice being distinctly audible either in the solo of a scold or the duetto or trio of a quarrel. Sometimes, it must be owned, the younger voices were distinguished in some indignant rejoinder; but more commonly their part of the performance consisted in sobs and tears! The servant of the house had volunteered the intelligence that Miss Clifford was "a picture painter," that Miss Susan "acted at the play-house," and that Miss Margaret, the youngest daughter, "went out teaching."

Brief but suggestive enough history of aspira-

tion and disappointment, of struggling and suffering!

One night, just as Mrs. Sefton and her son were on the point of retiring to rest, a cab drove up to the door, and a loud knock, followed by a faint scream, and then the confusion of several voices, proclaimed that something unusual had taken place. The fourth-rate actress commonly returned on foot, and appearing, as she generally did, in the after-piece, it was earlier than the hour at which she usually reached home. But she it was nevertheless.

"You must carry her up. Oh, send for a doctor!" were words that aroused Trevor, and he rushed down stairs in time to offer assistance that was very gratefully accepted. The poor girl, who could not put her foot to the ground, was suffering much from the ineffectual attempts of her sisters to carry her; but Trevor Sefton raised her in his arms as if she had been a child, and, without further change of posture, laid her on the sofa in the drawing-room. In a few hurried words he explained who he was, and that he belonged to the medical profession; and offered services which, by the patient at least, were most gladly received.

The mother looked at him with an expression that seemed to say, "So young—so wise! I don't believe it." And her silly thankless questions and busy ignorant interference hindered the examination of the injured ankle not a little.

I must try to describe that large and strangely-

furnished room, as it appeared by the unwholesome light of two tallow candles of unequal length and thickness.

The first thing which struck the eye was the circumstance of the dark and dingy small-patterned paper which covered the walls, having been made the background of various drawings in chalk, chiefly of the human face or figure, and nearly, and in some instances quite, the size of life; though, for the most part, they were little more than outline sketches, but outlines full of expression. Few would have thought that a woman's soul or woman's hand had been the creator here; so little was there indicated of the things or thoughts which we are accustomed to associate with a feminine nature. Figures writhing in anguish—features distorted by the most intense and fearful passions—and a greater number, still, of groups or studies, in which the very soul of melancholy seemed to have taken refuge. Only one solitary figure was there of a cheerful aspect, and this was a rough, but most powerfully expressive figure of Faith standing tip-toe on a globe, with rapt and uplifted gaze, and the drapery of a severed veil around her. A strange effect was accidentally produced by this drawing being partially executed over a half-erased group, in darker chalk, of the demoniac class; so that, to the eye of fancy, Faith—though intended for a separate study—seemed to be soaring from a world strewn with images of horror and of woe.

The floor of that large and lofty room was only partially carpeted, and the furniture was scanty and ill-assorted ; with those ghastly figures gleaming on every side—has the reader made a picture of the place?

On a sofa, drawn near the dying embers of the fire, lay the sufferer—a dark-haired, bright-eyed girl of three or four and twenty. There she lay, in a tawdry, flimsy, spangled dress, with large ornaments of mock jewels on her neck and arms, and the rouge but partially washed from her cheeks by the tears which had been wrung from her eyes by intense bodily anguish.

“I told you how it would be ; I knew there would be some accident in the scene of the Broken Bridge,” exclaimed Mrs. Clifford in tones of evident anger, though she would have told you she was angry *for*, not with, her daughter. “You should have refused to go on in the state it was ; and what could they have done then I should like to know?”

“Have found plenty others who were less particular ; and when Saturday came—oh, mamma, you should not blame me.”

“But I do blame you for being imposed on. But my children *are* the greatest idiots where their own interests are concerned.”

“Hish !” was murmured gently by one who had with much self-command made herself silently useful, but had spoken little ; this was the youngest sister, who raised her finger to her lip, and bent over the couch almost to poor Susan’s ear.

"But, Margaret,"—interrupted the sufferer, in a subdued voice.

"I know, dear; or, if I do not, you shall tell me by and by." And, pressing her hand, she quieted her more impetuous sister for the time.

Susan's ankle was not only severely sprained and bruised, but she had been otherwise hurt by her fall when the scenery gave way, and she was precipitated from a height of ten feet—and absorbed in the examination of her injuries, Trevor Sefton had scarcely noticed the younger sister; but Margaret's voice was so sweet, so full of character, that his attention was now arrested by it.

Margaret Clifford was about the middle height—that best height for grace and ease of carriage—with low shoulders, small hands, and a supple, girlish figure. Her features were good, though she was rather too pale. Perhaps it was this pallor which gave a tinge of melancholy to the countenance. As for her eyes, you could not easily make out the colour, they were so shaded by dark lashes—very much darker than her hair. She was about twenty. This was the young lady who "went out teaching"—the daily governess.

After applying the proper remedies, and recommending, with some emphasis, that the patient should be kept extremely quiet, and not be annoyed or disturbed on any account, he took his departure. But, of course, in the morning, he paid an early visit of inquiry.

His patient was doing well, and now, arrayed in a neat and simple morning gown, she looked like a gentlewoman. There is an intuitive knowledge and perception of character that is sometimes possessed by the very young, and sometimes not by the very old; for it is quite a mistake to suppose that wisdom of any sort must come as a natural inheritance to age. It was by a power of this sort that Trevor Sefton soon perceived that the young actress was a warm impulsive being; eager for praise, but more eager still for affection; capable of being moulded to high and noble purposes, but, alas! like all such natures, capable of being warped to the opposite extreme.

The sweetest flowers that grow—they which open most readily to the sunshine, which nestle the bee, and which shed their odorous wealth in lavish profusion—are the very ones which require the softest training; are the very ones which may be taught to twine around the porch of a happy home, or to creep to the student's window. Alas! as well to trail across the tomb, or cling to the ruin, or be trampled in the mire.

Trevor could not refrain from noticing the drawings on the wall, which were seen to greater advantage by daylight.

"Ah, poor Hester!" exclaimed Susan; "it is her only pleasure to draw these strange figures. I think it relieves her mind; and better display these horrible fancies here than give such expressions to the portraits she paints."

"Your sister then takes likenesses?" said Trevor, interrogatively, though he knew the fact.

"Yes, when she can find sitters: for, Mr. Sefton, we are all very poor, and that is the only thing Hester can do. She has not patience or method enough to paint pictures which might sell. But her miniatures are not good; we all know that, and she says it herself. Though she declares the people all look so heavy and stupid, that she cannot help giving them some sort of expression,—often, she says, the expression they would have if their natural feelings were laid bare. Indeed, sometimes she maintains there is a likeness when no one else can see it. But you must pity poor Hester, Mr. Sefton, not blame her: much sorrow has shaken her brain."

It was during a temporary absence of Mrs. Clifford from the room that the conversation had taken this half-confidential and melancholy turn; it became sufficiently commonplace so soon as she returned.

Presently Hester herself came in, to seek for a palette and various drawing materials, and replied to Trevor's salutation quietly, but with perfect grace and propriety. He noticed, however, that her style of dress was very singular. She was attired in the hideous fashion which prevailed about the years 1832 and 1833—the short petticoats—the enormous sleeves, and horrific equipments altogether. This was peculiarly strange, in an artist who, whatever her taste for portraying the stern or

grand might be, must have revolted from vulgar hideousness.

Well might they say "poor" Hester! She lived in a dream of the past, and had never had courage to fling aside a fashion which belonged to the time when she had seemed very fair to the eyes of one she loved.

Few would have connected a story of romance with that pale, haggard woman of thirty. But Trevor Sefton was of the few; and by that same intuitive knowledge to which I have before alluded, and whose best name is sympathy, he felt assured some history of the heart belonged to her.

There is no wonder he felt more than commonly interested in the family whose acquaintance he had made so strangely. And though, on this occasion, he did not see the youngest daughter—now engaged in her daily duties—she was by no means forgotten in his speculations.



CHAPTER II.

"They were men meeting every day;
Grasping each other's hands with earnest pressure
Upon the mart, or in the hours of leisure."

ALTHOUGH it may be taken for granted that Trevor Sefton is the more interesting person of the two, we must not entirely lose sight of the elder scion of the

family—the man of substance. He not only fulfilled his intention of getting rid of the rickety furniture, but he removed from the old house; not that he required or engaged a more commodious dwelling, but he desired to belong to a more fashionable neighbourhood. He had what to his own mind were highly satisfactory reasons for all his proceedings; indeed, he would have felt ashamed of doing anything without a motive.

It was quite a bachelor residence that he selected, and he fitted it up in a corresponding style. Not that ladies were by any means excluded from its precincts; on the contrary, he gave very gay parties, and entertained them frequently. But, without his ever having said so, it was somehow understood that the wealthy stockbroker was “not a marrying man.” Rather a ’vantage ground this from which to choose a wife! But there were many schemes floating in the busy brain of Charles Sefton; and gaining a partner that should do honour to his name, grace an establishment, and bring him an increase of fortune was but one, and at that moment, perhaps, not the most important of them.

He had been entertaining four or five friends at dinner; a small party, but the appointments had been of the most choice and elegant description. The cook had appeared an absolute creator of appetising viands; and the wines had been pronounced unsurpassable. Nevertheless, the dainty pleasures of such a meeting must come to an end, and the

guests had all departed save one. They did not know that the little *réunion* had been proposed with the expectation of its leading to the *tête-à-tête* which seemed to have come about in a perfectly accidental manner.

"You need not hurry away, my dear Mr. Joyce," exclaimed the host, stirring the fire, which, at his bidding, sent up a cheerful blaze; and drawing a commodious easy chair towards the hearth for his guest—"you need not go, though it happens, so unfortunately that our friends have evening engagements. It is quite early, I can assure you; and, if it were not, we are by no means pledged, in this house, to roost with the birds, or rise at cock-crow."

The crackling fire and the outstretched arms of the lounging chair seemed to second the host's entreaty; and the two gentlemen settled in for a cosy chat. Over a fresh bottle of wine, ordered up from a very particular bin, the conversation warmed to an absolutely confidential pitch—that is, confidential for the parties concerned in it, both being a great deal too shrewd to let out a word, even in the melting after-dinner hours, that would not bear the next morning's reflection. And as the events I have to relate belong to the fifth decade of the nineteenth century, they did not forfeit the character of gentlemen by Cassio's offence—suffering "the enemy" to "steal away their brains." Oh, no; the wine was only used as a good friend or servant.

"Depend upon it my dear sir," said Mr. Sefton,

"that the time is coming when the railways of England will be so extended—will demand such an amount of capital, that they will become the vehicle of a national investment. Fortunes will be made by the clear-sighted, the long-sighted, and" ——

"The lucky," interrupted Mr. Joyce, with a smile.

"I apprehend that the clear-sighted and the long-sighted, figuratively speaking, *are* the lucky," returned the other.

"Yes, if they have also prudence, caution, and self-control. But, to return to the subject of my daughter's fortune. I have not the least power over it, as I explained to you : it is in the hands of trustees until she becomes of age or marries. At the same time, I have that firm reliance on her word, that, though as a minor it might not be legally binding, I would fearlessly risk all upon it. She has just passed her twentieth birthday ; it would not be very difficult to raise the money for a year, if she would consent ; and, though certainly my entering on these speculations depends on her assistance, it appears to me that I should be able to add considerably to her property as well as to my own."

"I have little doubt we should make her twenty thousand pounds, thirty. Surely you have influence to persuade her to your wishes ?"

"I almost doubt it. My second marriage has separated Catherine from me in a painful degree ;

and though I well know feelings of dislike and suspicion towards Mrs. Joyce were first instilled into her mind by her mother's sisters, now that they are dead and gone, and my child is once more under my roof, the evil impression still remains."

"Somehow or other, stepmothers never are liked."

"Theirs is a most thankless office. I believe the most perfect of her sex could scarcely escape censure in the fulfilment of it. The fact is, all the relatives of the first wife arm themselves for a conflict which is ninety-nine times out of a hundred of their own seeking; they put themselves upon the defensive; determine not to allow any virtue, any merit in the living, as if such a concession would inflict, purgatory on the ghost of the departed."

Mr. Joyce spoke warmly, for his second wife was a sensible and amiable woman, and deserved both gratitude and affection, instead of the calumnies she had met.

"But is there no friend who might influence Miss Joyce?" asked Mr. Sefton.

"Upon my word," he said, after a moment's pause, "upon my word I don't know any one she cares about, except Miss Clifford, the governess to my younger children, with whom she has recently struck up a very warm friendship. In fact, lifting her out of her sphere, in a manner I do not altogether approve, for she is a nobody, I believe. Her father, unfortunate in business, died leaving two or three

girls to support their mother. .The old story, of which there is a new version every day."

"Ah, storks! There are a plenty of them in the world."

"Storks! What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Why don't you know the natural history of the storks; those dutiful and affectionate creatures, that take such care of the old and feeble birds, and are held up as patterns of filial devotion in children's story-books, to edify the rising generation? But the simile is not mine; it has been bandied about this long time, though I do not think it has travelled into print yet."

Neither of these men of the world would have given utterance to such an idea on any account, but they did not the less speculate in their own minds on the probability that the co-operation of a "stork" might, very possibly, be purchased—if not avowedly, by some dexterous stratagem.

CHAPTER III.

"Through suffering and sorrow thou hast pass'd
To show us what a woman true may be :
They have not taken sympathy from thee,
Nor made thee any other than thou wast ;
Save as some tree, which, in a sudden blast,
Sheddeth those blossoms that are weakly grown
Upon the air, but keepeth every one
Whose strength gives warrant of good fruit at last ;
So thou hast shed some blooms of gaiety,
But never one of steadfast cheerfulness ;
Nor hath thy knowledge of adversity
Robb'd thee of any faith or happiness,
But rather clear'd thine inner eyes to see
How many simple ways there are to bless."

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

THE acquaintance that Trevor Sefton had formed with the Clifford family did not ripen very suddenly to intimacy ; for, if the truth must be owned, his mother had a *little* prejudice against them, consequent on the frequent scoldings, or quarrels, whichever they might be called. And, though it was really very evident that the fretful-tempered, find-fault mother was the cause of these disturbances, the daughters were not those sublime angelic heroines—abstractions of humanity—whom novelists love to paint ; who bear every wrong and contumely with such holy resignation, such meek submission, that a more emotional reader sometimes finds sympathy degenerate into pity, or

else there steals into his mind a most heterodox doubt that might confound self-control with apathy.

No; the Cliffords were heroines of a finer quality than the statuesque damsels niched in the pages of romance. They were the Heroines of Private Life—of English Middle Class Life, in this fast-moving Transition Age—when the cry is still “On, on,” and a lifetime of action and emotion is crowded into a few years. Quick and keen of heart to feel and to suffer, they could not always mutely endure; and out of their home and in their home they had trials to brave more soul-subduing than the encounters which have won coronets and garters, and fame and titles. A hopeful, faithful spirit, and the energy that willed they should do and endure, they opposed to the “slings and arrows” of fortune; and for their home sorrows, so much greater and deeper, they had duty and an affection that struggled to be warmer than it was. I have said they did not always mutely endure; but it must be remembered that rebukes, much less quarrels, do not die away without there remaining some lees behind, only too ready to ferment on an opportune occasion, even if it appear a slight one to the casual observer.

Margaret Clifford was the first of the family who grew to be on intimate terms with Mrs. Sefton; and this was natural; for when Susan and her mother were at the theatre, and the elder sister

secluded, as was her wont, in her own chamber, some pretence or some reality often drew the ladies together. There was a coincidence, too, not without results.

The hour at which Trevor had to leave home in the morning to attend lectures, and that at which Margaret started to commence her daily duties, was the same; and the lecture-room and the pupils' residence lay in a similar direction. If Trevor chanced to overtake her on a showery morning, I don't see how he could avoid carrying the umbrella over her head; and on fine days it would have been hardly civil to pass her with a bow, and it would have been difficult, too, for she was a quick walker in cold weather, and walking by her side did not compel him to slacken his pace.

Many an agreeable chat had they about "everything in the world": and really there are few things more soul-invigorating than half an hour's lively chat with a congenial companion. It is a sort of quinine draught to the mind.

By degrees these accidental meetings became so common that, long before the winter was over, it would have seemed strange for a week to pass without their occurring twice or thrice; and they seldom failed to heighten the spirits of both, and cheer them for the labours of the day.

"You will never guess what I have come up to consult you about," said Margaret one day, with a smile, to Mrs. Sefton.

She had glanced round the room, and perceived that Trevor was not there. He came in, however, soon afterwards, and did not interrupt the conversation, though his presence might, perhaps, have checked its arising.

"Really, something so very surprising?" asked Mrs. Sefton, gaily.

"Nothing more or less important than the truly feminine subject of dress," returned Margaret. "I am invited to a gay party. Such a thing as this is quite an event in my life, I assure you, and I want the benefit of your taste in making a selection from a not very extensive wardrobe."

Trevor entered at this moment, and Mrs. Sefton insisted on calling him to the council. The merits of white net and worked muslin, blush roses and coral wreath, were discussed with some gravity, and yet with that covert smile which always will accompany such consultations.

To his great astonishment, Trevor Sefton detected in his own mind the wish that he too had been going to the ball. He should like to have seen Margaret Clifford in her robe of filmy white, and with the roses in her hair. Contrasted with her dark merino dress and close straw bonnet to which he was accustomed, the change would have appeared like the butterfly burst of the chrysalis. He wondered if she would be admired? She was naturally so very graceful that he felt sure she must dance well—that is to say, quietly, and like a lady.

Then came the wish that he could contribute to her pleasure, in however slight a degree, and it was with quite a thrill of gratification that an idea how, he could do so presented itself to him.

Be sure he did not forget the night of Mrs. Joyce's party. Be sure he listened watchfully for the cab that was to take her thither. Thrice he rushed to the window in mistake, and once was half-way down the stairs, but at last it was really at the door. Margaret was quite ready. People who go out seldom always begin their toilet in good time; and Trevor had the pleasure of handing her down stairs, and presenting to her a charming bouquet. It was a chilly evening in early spring, and she was enveloped in a large shawl, so he could not judge of the contour of her dress, but he thought the wreath of roses most becoming, and was amazed at the massive plaits of her rich auburn hair, which was commonly twisted round a comb into the smallest possible compass. He had too much delicacy and respect for her to utter any compliments, but perhaps he looked them; or perhaps it was pleasure at his graceful present which brought the colour into her cheeks, and made her look absolutely beautiful.

It was sad extravagance on the part of Trevor Sefton, the purchase of that choice bouquet; for the few shillings it cost were as much to him as nearly as many guineas would have been a year ago. I don't mean to say he went without a meal to pro-

cure it; for that would have been false economy, since they who deprive themselves of a dinner are likely to require a tremendous supper. But he felt what was worse than temporary hunger,—a prick of conscience for his lavish expenditure, and yet, wicked creature, would not have revoked the deed for the world!

The ball at Mrs. Joyce's was very like balls in general. I have heard it positively said that the company at a party may always be divided into three sorts: the young, untried, and hopeful, to whom the mere circumstance of "going out" is an event—a pleasure; who look upon the scene as a rich parterre from which some blossom of joy must certainly be culled; who are so easy to content and so difficult to disappoint! For a brief season these merge, while their places are filled by youthful successors, into the second class, those who have discovered that "going out" may be but a *triste* affair after all; who put the question to themselves, Whom shall we meet? be it the friend that is loved, the lion to be stared at, the singer to be heard, the conversationist to be enjoyed, or, it may be, the partner in an innocent flirtation to be trifled with. Alas! for the third class, dreadful to believe in it; can there be people, matronly dames and patriarchal gentlemen, who think the question "What shall we have to eat?" and to whom the *carte* of the banquet is the most charming of paper, except that issued at the Bank!

I am afraid there is a fourth class—people who go into the gay world from circumstance or habit, who are neither *gourmands* nor *gourmets*; who are far from the friends they love; who have outlived the season of flirtations, and who are too broken in heart and in spirit to rally their energies in the search of new enjoyments. These wear no outward badge, but they are to be recognised by the initiated, nevertheless.

Margaret Clifford had already thought and felt too much to belong exclusively to the first class; she was just passing out of it into the second. But she spent a delightful evening, though she could not look at her bouquet without thinking of the absent giver. Her self-respect, too, perhaps insensibly to herself, was fostered and gratified by the gracious manner in which she was received and entertained. Her pupils were too young to join the party; there was no “governess” association with her presence; no solicitation that she should make her musical talents conducive to the amusement of the guests; no absence of the thousand little courtesies that mark a watchful assiduity in the hosts.

Catherine Joyce was a warm-hearted, high-spirited girl, a good deal spoiled, as the phrase is, by the excessive indulgence of her mother’s sisters, with whom a great part of her early life had been spent, and who had doted upon her, but with a weak and selfish fondness, and treated her only as a pet and plaything. She was a creature of impulse,

as might be expected from such a training, and yet self-willed and obstinate in her resolutions when they were formed. Fully conscious of the power and sweets of independence which her fortune would give her, and of which she already, in some measure, tasted, through the handsome pocket allowance awarded to her by her guardians, she was yet of too generous a nature to love money except for its uses. Morbidly sensitive on the subject of her isolated position, she would have given half her fortune to purchase disinterested affection; but the suspicions and jealousies so mischievously implanted in her childhood were not to be easily uprooted. A warm friendship—notwithstanding that bar to friendship, inequality of position—was in process of forming between Catherine Joyce, the heiress, and Margaret Clifford, the governess, and the history of the latter being invited to the ball, though apparently somewhat complicated, was, in reality, simple enough.

Mr. Joyce had expressed a wish to that effect to his amiable and obedient wife; intimating a desire that she should be treated with all the consideration due to an esteemed and honoured guest. Moreover, the thing was done so dexterously that Catherine felt in it—as was intended—a double pride and pleasure: pride, that her friend was beginning to be estimated as she deserved to be; and grateful pleasure, to find that her feelings, her wishes, were consulted on such an occasion. Never

had she seemed so amiable, or in such high spirits, as on the day and evening of the ball. Yes, it was evident that wayward temper was only to be ruled through its affections.

I think the sun looks down on few things more beautiful than one that is very often laughed at and despised—Woman's Friendship! Unselfish, long-enduring, self-devoting is it; possessing, especially in girlhood, not a few of the characteristics of first and passionate love. The same deifying of the object is there—the same absorption of all interests in one; and this goes on until a "destiny is fulfilled," for weal or for woe, by one or by both. If for weal, friendship, that sympathises and rejoices, is content to shed its moonlight lustre on the loved one's path, still fullest and brightest, through life's darkest and most wintry hours; and, great as it is, yet content to be a lesser, lighter thing than humanity's yet holier affections. But if the destiny be not for weal; if love's sun be a thing to scorch, not cheer; if it pass away leaving a ruin behind, then does woman's friendship gleam out again like a planet after an eclipse, to comfort and console in sorrow and sickness—to cheer and assist in adversity—and to defend in absence from the harsh of tongue and bitter of judgment. And—for humanity is frail—if suspicion or error creep in between them, Woman, believing in the Good, forgives, and trusts again, where Man would only revenge!

"I am going to introduce you to a great friend

of Papa's," said Miss Joyce to Margaret Clifford. "I don't much admire him; but he has begged me to make him known to you."

As is so often the case on such occasions Margaret did not catch the name of the elderly young gentleman who was brought forward to her, and most probably would not have inquired it afterwards of her friend, had not her curiosity been piqued by his evident endeavours to make himself agreeable—endeavours which were not altogether successful. "Sefton—Mr. Charles Sefton," was the answer she received, and at the moment Catherine was addressed by some one else, and no more was said. But the coincidence of having met with a namesake of her younger friend, led to a conversation the following day, in which she learned many particulars connected with the family, and that the two were brothers.

Now the truth was, that since the conference between the two gentlemen which was described in the last chapter, Mr. Charles Sefton had altered his ultimate plans without materially changing his present tactics. He really admired Catherine Joyce very much—even her waywardness had a certain attraction for one who looked upon women as having "no characters at all;" and he had begun to think he would much rather have her for his wife, and thus possess her twenty thousand pounds, than connive at risking it even in the most promising speculations. Indeed, he had dwelt sufficiently

on the idea to feel excessively annoyed at the evident satisfaction with which Miss Joyce received the attentions of a certain Frederick Drayton, who appeared to him in the light of a young and good-looking, and, therefore, formidable rival.

The individual in question was a very commonplace person. London abounds in specimens of the class; and imitations of it are to be met with even in remote country places. Excellent dancers are they, and they excel especially in the waltz and polka; tolerable singers, for amateurs, and for the most part they can accompany themselves on the piano or guitar; can speak a little bad French, and worse Italian, and—threaten German. They have been known to make an acrostic on a lady's name, and are great authorities in all matters of fashionable gossip; for which multifarious accomplishments they are generally looked on as desirable acquisitions at a party, and often attend two or three in one night. The *genus* have sometimes a small fortune, about sufficient, in their own opinion, to supply them liberally with kid gloves, cigars, and patent leather boots; but which a few exert their ingenuity to live on entirely; while others dawdle over some pursuit that may bring them in a trifling addition of income. But, however small their means, their allowance of brains is usually still smaller; for the intelligence of one really sensible man might commonly be divided with advantage among three of the species.

It was quite true that the handsome, high-spirited Catherine Joyce had suffered herself to become fascinated by a creature of the above description. It is useless to attempt any explanation of things of this sort; and certainly, it is understandable that, of the two, a girl of twenty might prefer even Frederick Drayton to Mr. Charles Sefton. But, then, she had a wider choice!

What the French call *besoin d'aimer* — the necessity of loving — has more to do with these early fancies than anything else. The heart will cling "to the nearest, if not to the loveliest thing;" and it is no use wondering at or scolding about it, whatever else may be done. Perhaps if the warm and true friendship which was forming between Catherine and Margaret had matured to the intensity of unlimited confidence, events might have wretched themselves very differently. As it was, Margaret Clifford suspected, and sorrowed for her friend, but dared not question.

It was but a few days after the party, that Margaret was one morning in the act of tying her bonnet-strings preparatory to returning homewards, when Catharine entered the school-room and besought the governess not to leave yet, but to withdraw for an hour to her dressing-room. She declared she had something to say to her of great importance; and her flushed cheeks, trembling voice, and tearful eyes, confirmed her words, and almost alarmed her friend.

In a few moments they were *tête-a-tête*, hand locked in hand, the arm of one round the waist of the other, and Catherine's head leaning on Margaret's shoulder. Let us listen to the particulars of their interview.

CHAPTER IV.

"And soon we feel the want of one kind heart
To love what's well, and to forgive what's ill
In us."

FESTUS.

"I AM going to prove your regard for me," said Catherine Joyce to her friend, responding to the affectionate solicitude the other had evinced; "*you* will not fail me in the hour of trouble I am sure."

"Tell me how I can comfort and be of use to you," replied Margaret, pressing her hand, "and I will do it."

"You promise!"

Margaret Clifford was startled by the manner in which this exclamation was uttered, and she said,

"You would not abuse such a promise and ask me to do wrong."

"There it is," cried Catherine, releasing Margaret's hand and moving a little way off; "there it is. I do not want advice or remonstrance, yet I can see you are ready to offer me both instead of doing what I would ask you."

"Blind obedience is rather the office of a slave than of a friend," said Margaret, gently.

"I possess neither one nor the other, I believe," returned Catherine, with bitterness.

"Miss Joyce!"

"Miss Joyce! Well the truth is this: I am engaged to Mr. Drayton; Papa will not give his consent; and has forbade him the house, and has bribed the servants to intercept letters to or from him. Will you put one in the post for me as you go home?" and as she spoke she drew a sealed letter from her apron-pocket. Although Margaret waived it back, saying, "I wish you had not asked this of me," she could not avoid seeing the full, but as it happened, simple direction.

"Have you, too, been bribed!" exclaimed the other, too proud to let the tears flow, although her lip quivered with the effort she made to restrain them.

"Catherine, you are not yourself to-day, or you would not give utterance to such cruel suspicions."

"I don't know—I can't tell," continued Miss Joyce, without heeding the interruption. "I have heard it said that every one has his price; and sometimes I think it may be true."

"Catherine!"

"That I did not think this of you, I can prove. Yes, I can. I wanted our friendship to be disinterested, and pure, and devoted; but this, I suppose, is what Papa calls 'stuff and romance.'"

You are poor, and I am rich—tolerably rich, as the world goes—yet I never made you a present, did I?”

Margaret Clifford was silent for a moment; she knew not what to say that could calm so strange a temper.

“But I should have liked to make you presents,” resumed Catherine; “I bought them for you long ago, but I know I should have been suspicious of you ever afterwards. You might not have deserved it; but directly it was your interest to seem my friend I should have doubted you. Look here,” she continued, opening a box that was near her, and taking a small packet from it, “I bought this for you.”

It was a locket of beautiful workmanship, containing hair in the centre and set round with fine pearls.

“To see you in this mood,” said Margaret, averting her head, “makes me very glad you did not present it to me.”

At the same moment Catherine Joyce returned the trinket to the box, which was confusedly crowded with a variety of nicknacks, and, with a sort of wilful carelessness, she violently pressed down the lid. The locket came in contact with some hard substance—there was a crash, two or three pearls rolled upon the table, and, thoroughly ashamed of her childish demonstration of temper, Catherine permitted her friend to examine what mischief was done. The

trinket was quite spoiled, the setting being bent and broken, and the crystal in the centre being reduced to atoms. Margaret removed the glossy curl which this had enclosed, and, twining it round her finger, she exclaimed,

"I may keep the lock of your hair, Catherine, as a *souvenir*, without awakening your jealous fears."

The tone in which she spoke was sad, not angry—sad, without the mingling of one particle of self-laudation at her own more reasonable demeanour, or of reproach at the other's irritability. Their eyes met, and the petulant, self-willed Catherine burst into a passion of tears, and flinging herself on her knees, buried herself in Margaret's lap, exclaiming, "Do with me as you like; I am most wretched."

Subdued to something like a reasonable mood, she listened with tolerable patience to Margaret's entreaties—entreaties that she would pause, and at least refrain from active disobedience.

The gentleman in question, Mr. Drayton, had not made a very favourable impression on Margaret; her quick appreciation of character had enabled her to read him for the butterfly that he was; and besides, she had a wholesome horror of "idle men." As the nursery rhyme hath it, "Satan finds some mischief still" for such as he to do. She felt, by instinct rather than knowledge, that it was Catherine's fortune which attracted him.

It was a delicate matter to hint, and gently and

carefully as she approached the subject, it awoke all the morbid sensitiveness of the other.

"You think, then, she exclaimed, "that I have not qualities to make me loved for myself?"

"I think," replied Margaret, very gravely, "that to-day you are so possessed by a spirit of contradiction and suspicion that I had better leave you."

"No, stay! I want to know why you think Frederick is a fortune-hunter."

"Because a man who is content to live a useless life, and devote his time to pleasure-seeking and self-indulgence, must be incapable of entertaining a generous and ennobling sentiment."

"And is love so ennobling?"

"I believe that which deserves the name is so ennobling, that it makes the good better—the wise wiser—the dull, shrewd—and even the angry gentle."

"I did not think you were so romantic!" exclaimed Catherine, with evident surprise.

"Not romantic enough," she replied, with a smile, and endeavouring to give the conversation a livelier tone; "not romantic enough to wish your love story carried out, although it really has some of the popular elements which are supposed to interest; for instance, a relentless father who intercepts letters"——

"And a step-mother," said Catherine, with bitterness "it is all her doing."

"You are unjust to Mrs. Joyce; but, if this

opposition be her doing, I think you have a great deal to thank her for."

"The oddest part of my love story, I think, is my choice of a confidante. Really, a listener would expect to find you either a matronly dame, who talks unreservedly of the time when she 'was a girl,' or an ancient spinster, who is careful to avoid allusion to early reminiscences and personal experiences, but dearly loves the part of an adviser, nevertheless. One might fancy you anything rather than a girl of twenty."

"And do you know I feel as if I could not be so young. I have experienced and witnessed so many sorts of suffering that I seem to understand all. And women who have to struggle in the world after the fashion of the sterner sex learn to comprehend man's nature as well as their own. These experiences make one old before Time chisels the wrinkles or blanches the hair.

"Poor Margaret!"

"Nay, do not pity me. My strange knowledge is a rich treasure, and the pain it may sometimes bring me is a slight tax on its possession."

"And your experience tells you that you had better not post my letter?" resumed Catherine.

"My heart tells me that you should not act precipitately."

But it is not necessary to pursue every rejoinder of that lengthened interview. As Margaret descended the stairs, she was intercepted by Mrs. Joyce.

"Excuse me Miss Clifford," she exclaimed, "but I must speak to you."

Margaret, of course, surmised the questions that would be asked, and was painfully conscious of her trying situation. Had not her judgment entirely approved of the line of conduct she had adopted, no doubt she would have felt angry as well as pained at the cross-questioning which awaited her,—for nothing stirs the temper like the conviction that one has done a foolish thing. But the reverse was the case; and while she positively declined to act the spy on her friend, or to betray confidences past, present, or to come, she unhesitatingly promised to use her influence to prevent any clandestine correspondence between Mr. Drayton and Catherine Joyce.

When we look calmly and dispassionately at the actions of others, it seems so easy for them to follow the straight and simple path of right; and we are often more inclined to wonder how they could miss their way than to commend their constancy, as we should. But many are the mazes to lead astray, which the looker-on never sees.

Margaret had maintained her own self-respect on this somewhat trying occasion, and won the confidence and respect of Mr. and Mrs. Joyce; and it might be fancy, but really she felt from that day forward that her affectionate and docile little pupils were yet more fond and obedient—that the heads of the household treated her with more than ordinary courtesy—that the servants were more respectful

than before—and that even Catherine loved her better. So much for the tone and manner which, emanating she scarcely knew how, yet, certainly prevailed. Truly the daily governess was becoming a person of consideration among them!

She was one of right little consideration, however, apparently in her home: that holy word, whose meaning is so often perverted; which ought to be expressive of an ark of refuge from the storms of life, and a haven of peace and affection. Alas, to what myriads, the martyrs of domestic misery, are such associations but the gilded dreams of youth, never to be realised!

Margaret Clifford returned home to be scolded, *imprimis*, for having kept the dinner waiting—though her mother had by no means allowed it to be spoiled by any lengthened courtesy of this kind—and the poor girl might have been thought to expiate her fault by hastily swallowing an inadequate meal in that appetising condition known as “neither hot nor cold.” Secondly, for having, in the excitement of far other thoughts, forgotten a millinery commission for Mrs. Clifford, who was going with a chosen friend to a private box, to witness Susan’s appearance in a new character. And scolding third and faintest, was for having splashed her dress,—Mrs. Clifford sagely remarking that it would have been cheaper to have got into an omnibus when the rain came on than to have walked through it. Margaret feebly alluded to her dislike

of those noisy, nerve-shattering, inconvenient conveniences, but wisely allowed her mother to have the last thousand words.

All these are terribly unheroic admissions, only allowable because they are—true. Fancy a heroine, with a splashed gown, dining off half-cold greasy hashed mutton. Reader, if you can realise such a thing let me shake hands with you in spirit. It is hard to do I know,—heroines have been for so long a time attired in white muslin that never grows dirty; with auburn or raven ringlets which never drop out of curl, that the pattern has become a sort of stereotype. Then again, of old, they were endowed with supernatural powers of abstinence; a fortunate circumstance, as they were in constant apprehension of being poisoned by jealous husbands, avaricious guardians, or unrelenting gaolers. What wonderful feats, too, physically considered, they were enabled to perform. Midnight rides (undertaken at a moment's notice) over hill and dale, fording rapid rivers by the way, and threading their path by a miracle through mazy forests by the glimmering light of a waning moon, were quite common events, for which no further equipment than a "mantle" thrown over the aforesaid white muslin was ever necessary. And still the hair remained in curl, and colds were never caught, to rob the voice of its silvery tones, which were always ready to accompany the omnipresent lute or harp.

Thank heaven, "we have changed all that,"

and people are beginning to believe there may be heroines in sombre garments; with pallid cheeks and toil-stained hands. The world does not quite understand or take in the full measure of your true heroes and heroines yet; but it is beginning to believe there may be such, and this is a great point gained.



CHAPTER V.

"Her voice was like the voice of his own soul
Heard in the calm of thought."

SHELLEY.

MRS. CLIFFORD and her second daughter had departed for the theatre; and Hester, the eldest, had retired, as was her frequent custom, to her own chamber, either to indulge in wild and gloomy reveries, or shadow them forth with the pencil. Margaret was alone; and she sat for a while near the open window in that dreamy mood in which the senses are cognisant of all that passes though the mind may wander far away. To be sure there was very little in the aspect of that quiet street to distract her attention from engrossing thoughts. The postman, it is true, passed on the other side of the way with his quick step and impatient knock every now and then; but he brought no letters there; and the ringing sound of children's glad voices floated from the open drawing-room windows opposite, in

token that a father was returned from his daily labours—a father who could unbend his mind to meet their baby glee and dear caresses. Margaret could see the little urchins climb and cling about him; and the mother, in the early summer of her years, wait smiling and patiently till they had evinced their noisy welcome, sure herself of the last and warmest greeting.

It was a picture of domestic happiness that the heart deciphered, and which contrasted forcibly with Margaret's lonely and desolate home—for companionless she was. Of her two sisters one was an object of deep and painful pity; the other, impulsive and changeable, was absorbed in a profession with which Margaret had little sympathy, seeing as she did nothing but its trickeries and its mockeries. The poetry and power of Acting as a branch of art were not yet revealed to her.

She had sat in this dreamy, listless mood a considerable time—for the needlework on which she had been engaged had fallen unheeded on her lap—when she was aroused by a slight tap at the door, and the next instant Trevor Sefton entered the room. He came for a book of which they had been speaking a day or two before, and which Margaret had promised to lend him—at least, so he said, and so he thought; though, after lingering with her nearly an hour (it did not seem a quarter the time), he went away without the volume after all!

They had arrived at a significant stage in their

intercourse. The easy unsuspecting frankness of pleasant friendly companionship was fast melting away. Though not a word had passed between them that the vainest being could have interpreted as expressive of personal regard, there was a consciousness in the heart of each that would make itself felt; and yet they were very far from the full, deep confidence which only belongs to acknowledged love. General topics of conversation, somehow or other, commonly became personal, and there was a slight constraint of manner and occasional averting of the eyes, which made the gathering twilight anything but disagreeable. Conversation was much less fluent than it had been a few weeks before, and yet that hour seemed but a few minutes; and when at last he started up to take leave, there was a lingering pressure of the hand, neither resisted nor resented by Margaret, that, perhaps, made him forget the book for which he had come!

When the door was closed Margaret again sank into her chair, and mused until the soft twilight deepened into night. But her reverie, if not so calm as before, was also less sad. The strange chaotic feelings which had hitherto rather disturbed her mind than anything else, *would* now take the beautiful shapes of Love and Hope. But then came, like a shadow across the brightness, the bitter consciousness that they were both poor; and in this worldly world love is thought to be a luxury fit only for the rich.

From instinctive knowledge rather than experience Margaret Clifford had told her friend that love was an "ennobling sentiment;" and already was she beginning to prove the truth of her own words. Never had she felt so brave to meet the capricious temper of her mother as she did that night, when Mrs. Clifford returned home especially out of humour, partly because she had had an inferior box allotted to her, and partly because the new piece had been a failure. She was too cross to notice the wretched depression of Susan—or if she did observe it, no doubt she attributed her low spirits to the reprimand she had herself administered, and to the dissatisfaction expressed by the manager. The rôle apportioned to her was one of rather more importance than those she had been accustomed to sustain; and at rehearsal she appeared to enter fully into its spirit, and adapt herself admirably to the part. Alas! when night came she was like a lifeless clod; never had she acted so feebly.

But Margaret was not so easily deceived. She felt there must be a cause for the failure, instead of the failure being the cause of the unutterable anguish depicted in the poor girl's face; and in the silence of night, when their mother had fretted herself to sleep, and Hester had sunk into a fitful slumber, she wrung from Susan the history of her secret grief.

Strange, within twenty-four hours to be made the confidante of two love stories. And if subse-

quent events prove how curious was the coincidence, we need but remember that life abounds with startling circumstances. How often do we lose sight of an acquaintance for years, then come across him, perhaps, twice in a week ; or read for the first time of some by-gone fact, and, lo, the next day we take up another book of quite an opposite character in which it is mentioned ; or go into new circles, and find there some intricate chain linking us to the old ones !

In her misery, Susan laid bare her heart : it was too late to be warned or advised ; all she now asked was sympathy and compassion ; these she knew her sister would bestow. But if she calculated only truly on her tenderness and affection, she also was aware of her clear judgment and unswerving principles ; and, acting as a thousand others have done in similar circumstances, she had refrained from revealing passing events, while pursuing a wrong and imprudent course. Borne onwards, as if by an intoxicating dream, she had not dared to seek the counsel which her heart told her must awaken her to a darker reality.

It was a very common story. Flattered, and at first, perhaps, only amused by the eloquently-expressed admiration of a stranger—for her fickle lover was, by her own account, self-introduced—in the end, her fancy, if not her heart, had been captivated. The theatre afforded but too many facilities for carrying on a clandestine correspon-

dence, in which she had become involved; in short, she had lived for months in a world of her own imagination, believing in a love, and truth, and honour that existed nowhere else. That night, while dressing for her new part, she had received one of the scented satin-paper billets she was so well accustomed to recognise. But how different were its contents to anything she had expected! Expressions of devotion there were—such as a non-inventive genius might copy from a Minerva-Press novel—a plentiful sprinkling of “cruel fate” and “stern necessity,” with mysterious allusions to pistols and prussic-acid. But when Susan Clifford found, at the conclusion, that the cruel fate resolved itself into the stern necessity of marrying a lady possessed of a considerable fortune—“an event which she would probably find very soon announced in the papers”—she had common sense enough left to dismiss all fears of the writer proving a suicide.

But though indignation and contempt might struggle for the mastery in her heart, they could not prevent the wreck and ruin of that beautiful fabric her woman's nature had built. Is there much wonder that in the new play she had seemed like a lifeless automaton, rather than the spirituelle actress?

The heartless letter was signed with the single initial “F.”; and Susan refused to tell her sister who the writer really was.

"No, Margaret," she exclaimed, "spare me that confession. Let the secret be buried in my own heart; so that if, in the strange chances of life, we should ever meet, you may not have to blush for me, even if I find cause to blush for myself. It is a great satisfaction to me that he is in ignorance of my real name, knowing me only by that which I have assumed as an actress. Ah, you may look at the seal," she added, with a faint smile, "that tells no tales, for it is a very common one."

"You are wrong, dear Susan; I am 'herald' enough to know that the crest and quarterings are very *uncommon*. Were I so mean, I might wrest your secret from you with very little trouble by the help of this seal; but be assured I will not." And, as she spoke, she returned the letter to her sister.

"To think of heraldry being turned to such an account as that!" cried Susan. "Well, your head seems filled with all sorts of out-of-the-way bits of knowledge. I wonder if you will ever find room in it for love and folly. Nay, you need not change colour at the mere idea. But Margaret," she continued, after a pause, and the tears again flowing, "won't it be dreadful if I lose my engagement? Mr. — had calculated on the piece being a hit, and I have ruined it. What will become of me? I am fit for nothing but the stage. And just, too, as I was getting on, and making my way up the ladder."

The fears of the young actress were only too

truly realised. Her engagement was by the week, and the next Saturday she received her dismissal.

If the household of the Cliffords was very miserable when at least there was a sufficiency of means coming in for their daily expenditure, it may be conjectured what it became when the chief prop was removed, and new anxieties crowded thickly around them. It is justice, however, to Mrs. Clifford, to own that, like most ill-tempered persons, she bore real troubles infinitely better than imaginary ones; and, having found the safety-valve of hatred and indignation against the manager, her daughters experienced less of her wrath than they would have done under happier circumstances. And yet she loved them—in her way.

Weeks passed on. Margaret had taxed her strength to the utmost, and had taken additional pupils, to eke out their narrow means. She had really had very little time to devote to Catherine Joyce, and the interviews she had had with her friend had left rather a painful impression on her mind than otherwise, though she would have found it difficult to say *why* it was so. That she might arrange for her additional labours, and as the summer was drawing on, Margaret now began her avocations rather earlier than before; and, on her arrival one morning, she was met at the door by Mrs. Joyce, who was in tears, and she saw in an instant that the whole household were in terror and dismay from some sudden affliction.

"Oh, Miss Clifford," exclaimed Mr. Joyce, "I have sent a messenger to hasten your coming; you, perhaps, can give us some help, some clue, to point whither my daughter has fled."

"Fled! Catherine gone!" cried Margaret, in horror and amazement.

It was but too true; fled, as a letter she left on her table declared, to become that morning the wife of Frederick Drayton. Probably by accident, or perhaps on purpose, another letter was left behind, one from him to her, but it contained neither date nor address, and Mr. Joyce knew not the home of a mere acquaintance, whom, when invited to his parties, he had always addressed at his club.

But a strange discovery was at hand. The letter was shown to Margaret, and in an instant she recognised the hand-writing and the seal as identical with those of her sister's fickle wooer! She uttered a cry almost of joy as she exclaimed,

"I can save her—I can—I can."

"Perhaps—if you can find her before it is too late," said Mr. Joyce mournfully, "but where to seek I know not."

Margaret pressed her hand to her brow. She was trying to recal the dim memory of the address she had seen for an instant, when her friend had besought her to post the letter.

She experienced the common sensation of knowing she should recal it by-and-by; but it seemed as if

there were a weight, an accumulation of more recent events, to be removed from her brain first. And, what was worst of all, she could not command words to explain what she was trying to remember, or to describe—even if she had wished to do so—the subtle chain by which she saw that she could unmask the double deceiver.

At last the half-forgotten address dawned upon her. But when she gave it, they hardly knew what she meant.

“I will go; I will show you; come with me,” she exclaimed; and, scarcely waiting for Mr. Joyce to find his hat, she rushed from the house. Infinitely lighter of foot than that portly personage, she kept in advance of him sometimes half a street’s length; and, though the distance altogether that they traversed was but short, many were the heads turned to look at the hurrying pair.

At last she reached a certain street—approached a certain number: there was a carriage at the door. Breathless with running, Margaret Clifford darted up the steps and knocked loudly. The door was opened in a moment; for Mr. Drayton, dressed as a bridegroom, and accompanied by a friend, was just being ushered out. Margaret seized his arm, in the excitement of the moment, crying, “In time to save her!” And at this instant, just before Mr. Joyce came up, Trevor Sefton passed by, saw there was some strange scene enacting, recognised Margaret, and beheld her familiar action!

CHAPTER VI.

"I classed, appraising once,
Earth's lamentable sounds ; the welladay,
The jarring yea and nay,
The fall of kisses on unanswering clay,
The sobbed farewell, the welcome mournfuller ;—
But all did leaven the air
With a less bitter leaven of sure despair,
Than these words—' I loved ONCE.' "

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

AMONG the strange contradictions which startle a thoughtful observer, and show how completely the habit of viewing things through a selfish medium blinds and warps the moral sense, is the fact that we often hear of so-called "respectable" individuals lending themselves to promote the mercenary marriages of male friends or relatives, by those sinister yet effectual means which, if pursued by others towards *their* daughters or sisters, would draw down a torrent of vindictive reproaches. Thus Mr. Drayton had found a lady, a married cousin, ready and willing to assist him by making her house the rendezvous of the lovers ; and, finally, by throwing the ægis of her protection before the fair fame of Catherine, and accompanying her on that eventful morning to a certain church in a distant parish, where for the last three Sundays their banns had been published.

It is not worth while to do more than briefly explain how the intended marriage was stayed. Long and wearily the two ladies waited in the church for the would-be bridegroom ; and when at last he appeared,

crest-fallen and out of temper, he had only time to apprise them that Mr. Joyce was following on the instant, the driver of the carriage he had hired having yielded to a golden persuasion, and revealed whither he was to have conveyed him. An inexpressible sense of shame came over the heart of poor Catherine. Only now was she thoroughly conscious of the unwomanly step into which she had been led by her self-willed temper and imprudent passion. She trembled from head to foot, and large hot tears chased each other down her cheeks. The lady "friend," to whom the scene was too indifferent to arouse any feelings or expressions of real sympathy chinked the false metal of common-place set phrases in her ear; and Frederick Drayton, angry with himself and the whole world at the defeat of his scheme, was too much absorbed in his own egotism to play the part of consoler with any effect to her he had misled and deluded.

Meanwhile Margaret Clifford found herself, she hardly knew how, beside Mr. Joyce, rattling through the streets of London, in the first cab he had been able to find. She had an indistinct recollection of angry words passing between the gentlemen, and of a brief parley with the coachman at the door; but it was only now that she had time and power to reflect in what manner she dared use the knowledge she possessed of Mr. Drayton's unworthiness.

"Explain, my dear Miss Clifford," exclaimed Mr. Joyce, "what it is you know; I beseech you

tell me how you will prevail on my unhappy child to relinquish this worthless man."

"Alas! alas! I feel now that you must trust me," she replied, "that she must believe my word. I know the story of his heartless betrayal of another—but her name I cannot, will not mention: unless, indeed, this other victim give me free permission, and she is generous and may do so."

Perhaps Mr. Joyce thought a youthful confidence needed not so much respect; but since Margaret, at any rate, felt she could serve his cause, he strove to be content that she should do so in her own way.

Mr. Joyce was a warm-tempered man, and when he arrived at the church he found it difficult to conceal his indignation. Contrasted with her father's anger, her lover's selfishness, and the ill-concealed indifference of her new acquaintance, there is no wonder that Catherine appreciated the heartfelt sympathy of Margaret Clifford; for in this hour of shame and anguish she gave her pity, not reproaches; and when she but hinted that she had a tale to tell which would unmask the deceiver, Catherine fell upon her neck and murmured, "Take me home—take me to your home—I cannot go to mine. My brain reels at the thought of returning to the house which I believed I had left for ever."

Perhaps, under all the circumstances, this was the best thing to do. Mr. Joyce himself made but few objections to the plan; for he knew the influences by which she would be surrounded in Margaret's

humble home were the ones he would most covet. Mrs. Clifford was "charmed" to receive her; but, perhaps, had this tribulation come upon some poor dependent acquaintance of her daughter the case would have been wholly different. As it was, she made "great allowances" for the fault of the heiress, and behaved accordingly. But it is a remarkable fact that when we are in the depths of anguish, "the black hoof of care" pressing upon the spirit, we are peculiarly alive to the sincerity of the sympathy expressed by those about us. It is as if the highly-wrought brain rejects all medicine less pure than truth, deriving solace even from this in its most unpalatable form, rather than from sugared cheats and sophistries.

Margaret Clifford only did her sister justice when she called Susan generous. Now that revealing the tale of her own error and folly, with every faithful detail, might be of use in arousing Catherine from her dream, she confided it to her without scruple. It would have been a strange sight for Mr. Frederick Drayton, could he have witnessed the conference which was held between the three girls that very evening. Wholesome, in one sense, for him, or such as he, to know the scorn and contempt in which he was held by all; but, on the other hand, too deeply gratifying to a coxcomb's vanity to find how well and how warmly he had been loved by both his trusting dupes: had been—for it was all over. But even in yielding up its idol—the idol it

cannot, will not longer worship—the heart is terribly torn; and that revolution in life which suffering commonly effects, was working in both cases. With Susan Clifford those inly-bleeding wounds were developing powers, which had hitherto only been guessed at. With Catherine, the spoiled child, impatient to endure, and little accustomed to slights or contradiction, the process was different. Mortification, anger, a dying love, that was transmuting by some strange alchemy almost into hate—these passions were warring in her soul, sending the blood quickly to her throbbing temples, flushing her cheeks and flashing her eyes. Once or twice she raised her hands to her head, and spoke of pain; and when at last she shared Margaret's chamber, and sought sleep, she sank only into a fitful slumber, disturbed by half-delirious dreams. Before twenty-four hours had passed Catherine Joyce was in a brain fever!

I have often thought that it must be necessary for mental anguish to lead sometimes to disease and death, to point a warning to those who have passed unscathed, or to show to the less sensitive the force of grief. And yet an event of this kind is but as a lightning-flash, that shows for a moment the depth and darkness of the thunder-cloud! We never know the myriad sorrows which *all but* reach the weight beneath whose burden life and reason bend. Herein, too, is the physician often sorely taxed—seeing the results of suffering, and having to guess vaguely at the causes.

It was very natural that Mr. Joyce should wish to conceal from the world the lengths to which his daughter's infatuation had carried her. Nevertheless, he found it necessary to communicate some of the circumstances to Dr. Graham, the physician who had been called in, and who was a friend of the family.

On her first attack of illness, Trevor Sefton, being in the house, had been consulted; and so prompt and judicious had been his measures, that he won by them the high consideration of Dr. Graham, who generally saw him, and reported to him the progress of the case, whenever he visited his patient.

"I am obliged to leave town for a couple of days," he exclaimed one morning, soon after the dangerous crisis was past, "but I leave our patient in your hands, Mr. Sefton, with the greatest confidence. I wish, too, you would keep your eye on her kind and gentle nurse—that sweet girl to whom I believe she owes much more than you know, or than I am at liberty to tell you."

"You mean Marga——, Miss Clifford," said Trevor, colouring he knew not why.

"Yes," continued the kind-hearted, but somewhat eccentric, doctor, "though she tells me she is quite well, I presume to think that I know better than herself. And, really, when I reflect what would have happened but for her energy and presence of mind, I feel an admiration for her, and interest in her, not easily described.

The words of Dr. Graham seemed to roll away a mist from the mental vision of Trevor Sefton. The shock he had received on seeing Margaret at Mr. Drayton's door, and the circumstance he had witnessed there, had blinded his judgment, and suffered a cruel suspicion to have birth. It is true he knew nothing of Catherine's story: all that it had been thought necessary to mention was that she had disagreed with her family and had consequently left home for a time. But Dr. Graham's words showed that there was some mystery, and a mystery of which Margaret was cognisant; and this gave a different complexion to the whole affair. He was conscious now of what amid his more selfish sorrow he had scarcely observed, that her cheek was paler and her countenance altogether more expressive of suffering than could be accounted for, even by her anxious watching, especially now that her friend was pronounced out of danger. Could her evident grief have arisen from the change in his deportment towards her? He asked himself this question with a keen heart-thrill, in which were mingled bitter self-reproach, and yet a sense of recompense and satisfaction.

Trevor Sefton determined on that plan which in real life is always the best to adopt—to seek an explanation. True that novelists have been greatly indebted to the continuation of the misunderstandings into which they plunge the personages of their creation for the interest of their plots, and the

regulation quantity of paper they have been enabled to cover; but the moral to be deduced is one of warning, not of example: and they who are wise will never be too proud to ask the meaning of a word or action they do not like, and cannot comprehend, from friend or lover.

CHAPTER VII.

"A head to think, and hands to work,
Are a' I promise ye,
And they shall work your dochter's weal
Until the hour I dee."

FRANCIS BENNOCH.

"AND your mother?" murmured Margaret Clifford, looking down, and endeavouring to release the hand which Trevor Sefton grasped between both his own. For the explanation had been sought, and had ended in a declaration of love.

"My mother loves me," replied Trevor, "and will love her daughter; that is, if you have not already won her affections. I am prepared to hear some accusations of imprudence, and some homily against long engagements; but her heart is so true and so warm, that I fear neither selfish regrets nor worldly prejudices. I did not mean, thus poor and powerless, to have sought your hand; yet, dearest, how dared I have related to you the scene

I had witnessed, and, by relating, asked its meaning had I not loved you? And, surely, better to live years of hope and trusting faith, than months of jealous doubts and trembling uncertainty. Tell me, is it thus with *your* heart?" And he bent his head towards her, and would have an answer.

"Yes."

There was one thing, however, in reference to his mother, on which Trevor Sefton had not calculated, and that was the pang which, under the most favourable circumstances, an attached mother always feels on discovering that another, young and fair, is becoming dear to a beloved son: with so much, too commonly, besides youth and beauty, to out-rival her, and weigh against long years of devoted affection! Youthful sympathies, and energies unchilled—and radiant hope, with wings unwounded.

But where hearts are right, as theirs were, the mother, whatever she may think, is not displaced. Another love grows in the heart, it is true, but the heart expands to make way. Nay, the human heart, I verily believe, is the wiser and better and happier the more it is full of warm affections; and the stronger and braver the more it is sustained by their soft woodbine links.

Without pausing to analyse such thoughts or opinions, Mrs. Sefton felt thus; and though she started with astonishment when her son related the event of the day to her, and trembled for awhile at the thought that he with fortunes still to achieve

had wooed one as poor as himself, she was soon won over to believe that a reciprocal attachment would be but another incentive to exertion, and the goal to which he looked but a star to guide him the more steadily on his course. She had had many opportunities of knowing Margaret Clifford—opportunities which the mere conventional forms of society could not have afforded in a dozen years, and the result was, that she thought her almost worthy of her son; an admission which might very nearly be taken for a patent of perfection.

Mrs. Clifford had still to be consulted; but though she possessed a bad temper, which often gave pain unintentionally, she had not a bad heart, which would have inflicted it systematically. And taking into account that no marriage was contemplated until Trevor should in some way have established himself, opposition on her part was not very likely.

It was the following evening; and some strange magnetism, exerted secondarily in the form of an invitation from Mrs. Sefton, had drawn Margaret up-stairs to her little drawing-room. A looker-on might have told at a glance that matters had been arranged in a tolerably satisfactory manner. The ladies bent over some needlework, yet though they did not seem very intent upon it, neither did they talk much. Trevor seemed to watch the movement of Margaret's slender fingers with extraordinary interest, though he had been repeating a confession

which he had already made to Dr. Graham, namely, that he was the author of some articles on Consumption, published anonymously in a medical journal, and which had attracted very considerable attention. He had been moved to this revelation by having that very day received a cheque for twenty pounds from the publisher, the which he contemplated with feelings that he himself smiled at as childish. But who that has ever wanted money can forget the sensation of acquiring his first earnings! It is as if nothing before had ever been one's own; and that is a strange nature which does not experience a strength-giving honest pride in the acquisition.

It was at this juncture that a note from Dr. Graham was presented to Trevor Sefton. It contained the following words:—

"I told you, my dear young friend, that the Fates were busy with your destiny, and thus are they planning. I have been called in to attend a consumptive patient, whom I have ordered to Madeira for the winter. She is desirous of taking out a medical attendant; I have named you; and, in short, the thing rests in your own hands. Call on me at twelve o'clock to-morrow, and I will take you with me for the introduction.

"By the way, there is one strange thing which I must not forget to mention. Mrs. Smith begged me not to let her husband know that you have written on the subject of Consumption, and especially not to mention that you are the 'Alpha' of ———. I feared he might object to your youth, and rather desired to make the most of what you had done, but she over-ruled me. The *guess* at her reason is one I dare not commit to paper. They will sail in September.

"Yours,

"FRANCIS GRAHAM."

F

With flushed cheeks and a trembling frame, Trevor handed the letter to his mother.

"Read it aloud," he exclaimed; "there are no secrets here;" and taking a hand of Margaret in his, and leaning affectionately over his mother's chair, they listened.

"And you will go?" asked the widow, tearfully.

"Yes, dear mother, if it be possible. This event seems to me like the dawn breaking in upon the darkness. Now I see the stepping-stone—the first rail of Fortune's ladder—which I have been seeking so long, and which it is generally so difficult to find. Hope brightens—energies will be redoubled: and the separation you, dear ones, must meet as bravely as I will; and neither will be desolate, for I leave you together."

What a strength and comfort lie in cheering words! and these were not false and cheating ones, but full of truth and meaning. Mrs. Sefton held out her arms to Margaret, and the warm embrace which followed was a mute but indissoluble compact between them.

Trevor was punctual to his appointment the following morning, and he found the carriage of the physician already at the door. Dr. Graham would not listen to any acknowledgment of obligation from Trevor.

"Say not a word about it," he exclaimed, "I only did my duty in recommending you, for I believe you to be thoroughly qualified for the post.

If you like the idea of it, so much the better ; and I think, as you say, that the voyage and novelty of the scene will enlarge your mind, and that a personal knowledge of the climate will be of service to you in future. Useful introductions may follow ; and certainly, if you were a son of mine, I should advise you to accept the offer. But now I must tell you about the people you will be with ; and I feel that, under the circumstances, I am justified in breathing to you the suspicion which I dared not write."

"I need hardly say, dear sir, that your confidence shall be respected."

"Had I any doubt on that subject," continued Dr. Graham, "we should not be on our present errand. I do not generally pry into my patients' concerns ; but it has so happened that, from my connection with some of their acquaintances, I could not help hearing a good deal about the Smiths. You will find him a man of talent, unquestionably—smooth-tongued, and of specious manners. But, for my own part, I don't like him. His wife is a dozen years older than himself, and he married her nearly a dozen years ago, for the sake of the fortune which supports him in idleness. I believe her constitution was always very delicate, and hence her education was somewhat neglected, or perhaps I should say was more superficial than solid. She was doated upon by her father, who made all his money in trade. But from her ill health her youth was passed

chiefly in retirement, and having reached six or eight and thirty when her father died, I dare say he thought she never would marry. At any rate he left her mistress of eighty thousand pounds, only shackled with the condition that, if she should marry it must be settled on herself. Nevertheless, her husband enjoys the income; and she is a kind-hearted, generous soul—a great deal too good for him. Poor thing, she is not the first silly woman whose fortune has purchased a master; and won't be the last. I don't say he ill-treats her; for, seeing that she can bequeath her money to whomsoever she pleases, it would not be his interest to do this. But I verily believe that he is disappointed at her living so long, and that his disappointment has engendered that dull and sullen hatred, which is slow of growth but of the most deadly intensity."

"In short," interrupted Trevor Sefton, "you think that he wishes her death and not her recovery; and hence would prefer an inexperienced attendant."

"Exactly so; and moreover, that she suspects his feelings. But we are close to Harley-street, and I am glad you know thus much."

The gentlemen were expected, and were ushered at once into the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Smith. The lady was reclining on a sofa, and, notwithstanding her evident ill-health, looked younger than she really was. She had never been handsome, but there was a sweet expression about the mouth which

told of amiability; and the fatal hectic on her cheeks lent that brilliancy to the eyes, which is so often an accompaniment of heightened colour. She was attired in white, but had drawn a large scarlet cashmere shawl around her. A Blenheim spaniel nestled by her side, and one of her thin hands was buried in its silky hair, the large sapphire and diamonds of a singular and antique ring which she always wore gleaming from among it, though the supporting finger was hid."

"My dear lady," said Dr. Graham, "this is not a morning for open windows in your apartment; for, though the sun shines brightly, there is an easterly wind laden with mischief to stronger frames than yours;" and, as he spoke, he pulled down the sash.

"Mr. Smith persuaded me—" began the lady.

"My dear Clara," interrupted he, "I had no idea that the wind was easterly: there must be something the matter with the vane, for it stood this morning to the south, with a point west if anything. And I know sometimes you are oppressed for want of air."

"There is great judgment required, I know," said Dr. Graham, with some tact, "for our patient is like a sensitive plant." And then he felt her pulse, and began questioning her of the day's symptoms.

Meanwhile, the husband busied himself in attempting to arrange the sofa-cushions; but every movement was followed by the spaniel's bright

eye, as the little animal crept stealthily towards its mistress' head.

"Down, Victor, down!" said the lady, in a tone that was half caressing, though she meant it for a scold; and the obedient creature crouched by her side, though not without a smothered growl.

She did not know that poor Victor had some wrongs of his own to revenge, in the shape of sly kicks and buffets, as well as those of his mistress, which he divined by the instinct of his kind. For no one who is *acquainted* with dogs can doubt their intuitive knowledge of friend and foe to those they love.

The communication made by Dr. Graham to Trevor Sefton had been so strange, and his introduction to the personages who seemed likely to influence his career had followed so quickly, that, to own the truth, he was a little confused, and by no means appeared to the greatest advantage. His own predominant feeling was that, had not the cue been given him by which to judge he should have been for a very long time deceived by appearances. As we know, he did not desire to impress Mr. Smith with any very exalted idea of his abilities, and certainly that rather shrewd individual did not surmise their quality. He took Trevor for an everyday sort of young man, and supposed he would make a tolerable companion — one who, at the worst, would prove a relief to the *tête-à-têtes* matrimonial. He saw that he was young, and he knew

him to be poor, and it was a dependent that he wanted.

Dr. Graham's recommendation, and Trevor's willingness to accept the proposed situation, had prevented any obstacles arising. The salary named was a handsome one, and the interview passed off with ease and courtesy. Just before taking his leave, Trevor had been seated for a few minutes on the sofa beside Mrs. Smith, a proximity which Victor did not quietly allow to every one. Trevor, however, he welcomed with most eloquent tail-wagging, and pushed a cold nose into his hand by way of seeking some caress in acknowledgment of his greeting.

"Victor makes friends with you already," said his mistress with a smile. "I hope you do not disdain his good will?"

"Indeed, no," replied Trevor; and after a moment he added, "and I will try to imitate his fidelity."

Their eyes met at the moment, and something there was, either in the words or in the expression of the speaker's face, that brought tears to the invalid's eyes. They did not flow thence, but the emotion she felt, perhaps, caused her to press his hand at parting more warmly than she could have thought it possible for her to do an hour before.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Onward she sailed ;—with her most precious freight,
Bound for the sunny isle, where grow the vine
And myrtle."

BRAVELY as Trevor and Margaret had looked forward to the separation, as the time for his departure drew near, a sensation of anguish crept into their hearts, and would make itself felt. And yet so thankful they both were for the means which presented themselves of Trevor pushing his way, that they would not have altered the arrangement if they could; and so completely did they keep up their spirits to the last, that lookers-on were even surprised at their composure. Many cares, however, and anxious thoughts pressed upon him, full as he was of hope—thoughts that might rather be guessed at than known, even by those to whom he was nearest and dearest.

"Margaret," exclaimed Trevor one day, when, after the fashion of lovers, they had been conversing about themselves, and in a manner quite uninteresting to any one else, "try to tell me truly, would you have been happier had I done as honour at first prompted, and left you free—unwooed—until I had worked my way to competence at least?"

"I thought you had established a code above the common false notions of honour," she replied, with a faint smile. "How strange it is that your

sex should think it no dishonour to win a heart by every demonstration of sympathy and affection, and yet, because the want of the world's ruler, Gold, makes a gulf before the present completion of a marriage, to leave that heart tossed between hope and fear and by the most cruel doubts; wrestling with the very affection the lover has striven to create, and full of womanly shame at the belief that perhaps it exists only in her own soul; and this is called leaving her free, because certain formal prosaic words have not been spoken."

"But, dear Margaret, all the world preach against long engagements; even my mother recommends that we marry so soon as I have a prospect of moderate competence."

"Is the terror against long engagements," said Margaret, gaily, and evading his last remark, "lest people should change their minds? If so, it occurs to me they had better do so during the engagement, 'long' or 'short,' than when it is too late. But," she continued, after a moment's pause, "I have often been on the point of telling you poor Hester's story; and, as it is somewhat *apropos* of our subject, I will do so now."

"Poor Hester!" interrupted Trevor; "I owe her much for advocating my cause so warmly as she did; and whatever her heart's history, that has wrecked its peace and warped her genius, I feel sure that she has been the sinned against and not the sinning."

"The kind world would perhaps see no sin anywhere, and only folly on her part. I was a mere child at the time of my father's death, but Hester was nineteen or twenty. It was for the months preceding, and for a little while following that event, that Geoffrey Smith visited constantly at our house. So far as I recollect, he was handsome and agreeable; but children have odd notions about people, I am aware. The chief bond of sympathy, however, between him and Hester was their love of painting, for he was studying art as a profession; and she, in those summer days of her life, was following it for love of itself, with all the enthusiasm of her nature; and little dreaming that, in darker times, it would form a precarious means of existence. *Then* the apparently wealthy merchant's daughter was a match far above the struggling artist; and I believe at that time Geoffrey Smith refrained from addressing my sister openly, because he dared not hope her family would accept him, and was not sure, of what I am afraid was the truth, that her attachment was blind enough to have tempted her to overstep the barrier of their opposition."

"Geoffrey Smith!" exclaimed Trevor; "I wonder if he were any relation to the Mr. Smith with whom my lot is cast. His name, I think, is George—indeed I am sure it is."

"I never heard of his having any relative George; but Smith is so common a name, we have long since given over inquiring about him. But to

proceed. The destitute condition in which my father left his family was not known immediately on his death; indeed, the fact which surprised all the world was only discovered on winding up his affairs. I need not tell you, dear Trevor, of the struggles which ensued; they would but make a common story that is acting every day in a thousand quarters beneath the surface of society."

"In which," exclaimed Trevor, with much emotion, "women for the most part play the tragic parts; toiling their very lives away for a pittance that will scarcely support existence, and that is awarded them on the same principle that fuel is doled out for a steam-engine, to keep the machinery at work; not as what the recompense for labour should be—the means of independence, and a provision for the future."

"By degrees and without, as I have been told, anything like a leave taking," said Margaret, "this Geoffrey Smith discontinued his visits; and then began the lingering torture, which has shaken a fine mind and withered a loving heart. Judging by her own faith and devotion, she sometimes thought he had left her side only to return when fortune was achieved; and it may be, that while this belief was strong her energies were braced to exert her talents to advantage; for she is the eldest of the three, and on her devolved, in a great measure, the education of Susan and me. But years rolled on, no authentic tidings were received, though vague

reports were wafted about that he had left England; but his exceedingly common name increased the difficulty of ascertaining what had become of him. The hope of his return, the belief in his affection, have grown fainter and fainter, and in due proportion has her eccentricity increased. You know how she clings to every memorial of the past, thus feeding the sickness of her heart; but you cannot tell what it has been to watch the slow decay of her mind."

"Dreadful!" murmured Trevor, strongly affected; "they have much to answer for who trifle with the heart of another from idleness and vanity. You are right; better for Hester would have been an engagement made and avowedly broken, than years of lingering uncertainty, which have consumed the brightest period of her life."

And now, before this chapter is closed, there must be a brief mention of Catherine Joyce and Susan Clifford.

The former was recovering from her dangerous illness, but she was still weak and delicate. Change of air had been recommended; and, in company with a widow lady, an old friend of her family, she resorted to the sea-side. But it seemed as if an entire change had come over her nature. She was no longer selfish and self-willed; and no longer chary, from a sickly, morbid sentiment, of bestowing gifts or conferring those kindnesses which the rich can, if they try, shower so beneficially on the poor. Suffering had "cleansed her bosom" of the "peril

ous stuff" which had weighed down her better qualities, and her character shone out with much of real nobility.

True, bodily pain and mental suffering had swallowed her cheek and attenuated her frame; true, that in a few weeks she looked years older: but her youthful bloom was exchanged for an expression so *spirituelle*, that many there were who thought her more attractive than before. The strange link which had connected her destiny with that of Susan had bound them so much together, that the latter seemed now more Catherine's intimate friend and associate even than Margaret; and when the trip to the seaside was decided on, she insisted that the young actress should accompany her. Alike in their impulsive characters, alike in one accident of their lives, there must have been some difference in their natures, too. The ordeal to which they had been subjected had thrown one on a bed of mortal sickness, from which she had rallied a nobler creature than before. The mind of the other, as has been seen, was stunned for awhile, but her bodily health had but slightly suffered. Susan's signal failure in the new character, from which so much had been expected, had destroyed the London manager's confidence in her ability; she saw no prospect of a re-engagement with him, and looked only to find some employment in the country.

"Wait till the winter," said Catherine, when the subject was discussed; "till then you are my guest.

We are going in search of health and spirits, and till they are restored we can lay no plans for the future."

"Do you remember," said Margaret, with a smile, one day, long after a much costlier present than the pearl locket, had been forced upon her and many kindnesses showered on the whole family—"do you remember, Catherine, the fear you used to entertain that people should love you only for the good you did them? If love be marketable in this way, you must have laid in a great stock lately."

"So that you do love me," she replied, with a faint blush and a half repressed smile, "it cannot signify *why*. It occurred to me, one day, that we look for the sunrise *because* it is to bring us light and warmth; and that we cherish most the flowers which give us odour, and so——"

"You have discovered," exclaimed Margaret, carrying out the simile, "that you would rather be a rose than a japonica."

"Just that," returned Catherine; "though I am afraid I am a very poor sort of rose at present. However, in those bygone times I believe I was more like a nettle than anything else. If Mrs. Jo—if Mamma did hate me, I am sure I don't much wonder at it. But can you come with me to the bazaar to-day, for you know I am going home for a week to make preparations for Broadstairs, and I want to take with me some toys for the children!"

Small events on board a ship become subjects of

note for the log-book or private diary, as every one must have remarked on perusing either. And no wonder; the *ennui* of even a fortnight's voyage to an active mind would be pitiable, did there not always seem to creep over the spirit a corresponding listlessness. It is very strange; but no one seems inclined to do anything beyond eating and sleeping, and sauntering with less exertion than is required for a walk, and talking with less animation than is required to converse. Nevertheless, the idleness indulged in is not altogether of an unprofitable sort; it is the place, of all others, in which to dream—to plunge into reverie, and bring from its quarry the rich material with which to build in the future many a fabric of truth, and beauty, and grandeur; it is the place, too, in which to form intimate acquaintance—ship and friendship, and to study character with the greatest accuracy.

Yes, for it must be the true metal of generosity and nobility of character which never displays petty selfishness under petty trials—which never takes “accidentally on purpose” the snug corner of the cabin on a chilly day, or seeks the shadiest nook on deck, if the heat be oppressive—who is never obstinately blind to the comparative smallness of some epicure's dish, nor obstinately deaf to any suggestions that might infringe on his individual comfort, and which, accordingly, he does not choose to hear; in short, who never yields to any of the thousand-and-one temptations which present themselves

for the indulgence of petty selfishnesses to travellers either by sea or by land.

Mrs. Smith was not the only invalid on board; not the only one who, bowed by the scourge of our northern home, was lured by Hope's sweet promises to seek health in a softer clime: and Trevor Sefton had melancholy opportunities of observing the disease to which he intended to devote his talents and attention.

His own special patient treated him with almost the kindness of an elder sister, mingled with the deference due to a superior mind, for she was one of those gentle beings in whom the venerative principle is strong, and whose fault is that of too often yielding its homage to false deities. With so much as there was deserving respect in Trevor Sefton, no wonder she esteemed him highly. For his part he felt every day an increasing regard made up of an appreciation of her many generous qualities, of pity for an evidently unhappy destiny, and of grateful emotion for many acts of delicate kindness he had received from her. It was a subject of deep distress to him to note, that, notwithstanding his skill and attention, her health did not improve, but rather that she grew gradually worse.

One day Trevor had been greatly annoyed at discovering that the lock of a medicine chest which he kept in his own cabin had certainly been tampered with; and what was more, he made the discovery in the presence of Mrs. Smith, for he happened to

have brought out the chest before opening it, instead of, as he had sometimes done, only bringing the drug required from it. She became more excited than he had ever seen her, insisted on examining the key, and, on trying the lock herself, turned deathly pale, and trembled from head to foot, and finally declined taking the proposed medicine until he had analysed it, and ascertained that it was exactly what he expected. This was done to the satisfaction of both; and, indeed, every bottle and every packet was rigidly examined. Trevor, however, expressed his most unqualified belief, that though some intended pilferer had been at work, whoever it might be, had been foiled in his attempt, and that the contents were undisturbed. But the circumstance was a source of exceeding vexation nevertheless.

The next day shone forth; a day of sunlight and glory, such as the voyager so often finds when he reaches ten or fifteen degrees south of the British seas. The white sails glistened in the sunshine, as, obedient to a light breeze, they bore forward the graceful vessel; and the deep purple waves heaved gently, as if with an emotion of gladness. Trevor Sefton was pacing the deck, thinking a thousand thoughts. Hoping almost against hope for the recovery of his patient; striving to pierce the misty future of his own career; and then, by a very natural transition, dwelling fondly on the beloved two—his dear mother and Margaret; and remembering how the night

before the northern stars drooping perceptibly towards the horizon, had told him most distinctly how far the lengthening chain of distance was already strained between them !

Suddenly Mrs. Smith appeared beside him ; she touched his arm, for he had not at first observed her. It was early ; she had but just risen, and had thrown a large shawl round her morning wrapper. She had put on a bonnet, it is true, but the strings were untied, and Trevor saw that her soft hair, which was usually arranged with great neatness, lay in loose tangled masses, this evidence of a restless night still unremoved. But it was her countenance that alarmed him. With all his watching, he had never seen such a hectic spot as that which now burned on each cheek.

A poet says, "Beware the passion of a quiet man !" And with equal truth may it be said, beware of rousing the latent indignation of a long-suffering and injured woman, be she by nature ever so gentle. Her voice was low, but stronger than Trevor had ever heard it, though it trembled with half-suppressed passion. She held a bunch of keys in her hand, and, pointing to one of them, she exclaimed, "Here is the evidence of his guilt ; the murderer that would be."

Appearances were certainly very suspicious. A small key, closely resembling that of the medicine chest, was slightly bent, and between the wards remained a minute particle of some injured lock,

which had probably escaped the observation of the owner of the keys,—and that was the husband of the lady! For no honest purpose could the attempt have been made; and the reader may as well know at once the extent of injury meditated, by one, who, originally deficient in the conscientious principle, had sunk the condition of his mind lower and lower, till now, at five-and-thirty, crime had lost for him its hideous appearance, and there was scarcely an act he would have hesitated to commit under moderate temptation, provided he were safe from discovery; or, if discovered, secure from punishment.

Now, to have substituted a pernicious drug for those his wife was in the habit of taking, would have been a dangerous experiment; but there was comparatively little risk in exchanging them for a preparation of coloured meal and coloured water, which, while they assuredly would not kill, would be equally powerless to cure. This was what he had intended; and what, from a long and intimate knowledge of the chemical attributes of a painter's colours, he was well qualified to execute. But the suspicions of the injured wife once fairly roused, they went much further than the truth. While he was lounging over a luxurious breakfast, she ransacked all his possessions, for the accident of finding his keys gave her access to them; and though Trevor had endeavoured to turn her thoughts from the suspicions which yet he could not in his own heart discard, and had implored her for her health's

sake to calm the excitement under which she was labouring, his words seemed to fall as if she did not hear them, or, hearing, did not understand. Her wrath, be sure, was not abated by discovering among other things the miniature of a beautiful girl. True that the date it bore was anterior to the period when she first knew Mr. Smith; but why had it been preserved so carefully and so secretly? Again she rushed to Trevor Sefton, now with what she believed to be a new evidence of her husband's falsehood; and though he concealed the knowledge it imparted, it was with no common emotion that he gazed upon the miniature. He might not have recognised in that girlish, blooming face the portrait of her whom he had only known as a faded sorrow-stricken woman, had not the peculiar dress—the fashion of the period—been that in which he had grown accustomed to recognise Hester Clifford. The fashion first recalled her to his mind, and then he saw that it *was* what she *had been*. Conjecture merged almost into certainty, even before he said—

“Think you this is Mr. Smith's own painting? Is he at all an artist?”

“Oh yes?” exclaimed the lady, in a spirit of irony and mean recrimination, which were very foreign to her character, but which had play for once; “oh yes, he has the aspirations of a Michael Angelo; but, as for talent or power, I believe he would have starved if I had not been idiot enough to marry him—that is, if he had attempted to live honestly.”

"It is strange," interposed Trevor; "for even the love of Art, or the mere aspiring to be an Artist surely tends to elevate the character."

"Not at all. I remember reading the account of some ancient painter of great celebrity, who used to torture his slaves for the purpose of watching their throes of agony, and transferring the expression of them to his canvass. I do not see that the love of art elevated his character, do you? I rather think it tended to prevent the love of things higher even than itself; and ever since I read that story I have thought what great exceptions there are to the rules which the world takes up as matters of course. And as for an aspiring man being of necessity a good or a happy one, my young friend, you are equally wrong. If, with the aspiration, he lack the power of execution, he is likely, on the contrary, to be intensely selfish and envious, and exceedingly miserable."

Trevor was silent, for he felt the truth of her words: and certain it is that, under the influence of deep and strong passions, even common-place people strike out truths, which at another time they would not have reached. She quickly, however, reverted to the miniature, and would have dashed it under her feet.

"Nay," said he, attempting to take it from her hand, "do not strive to injure this. But answer me one question; is not Mr. Smith's name George?"

"No," returned she, "not George, though every one fancies it is, because he always signs himself Geo. His name is Geoffrey."

"Do not trample on the miniature," pursued Trevor, not choosing to show how much he had been interested in her answer: "do not trample on the unoffending ivory. You will not, when I tell you that I chance to know the original, and that she is good, and gifted, and—unhappy."

"Take it, take it," she murmured; "but do not let me see it again." And as she put it into his hand, the tears came to her relief.

A curious scene was enacted that afternoon. The invalid lady had drawn up a brief, but perfectly legal, will (women of property are generally good lawyers, so far as securing their money or transferring it goes), and requested the signatures of the Captain, two of the passengers, and of Trevor Sefton himself, as witnesses that she ratified the act. Except three hundred a year to her husband, and a few legacies to public charities, the whole of her fortune was bequeathed to a distant relative of her father.

"You see, Mr. Sefton," she said, about an hour afterwards, "I have not left you any legacy. I wish to make it your interest to keep me alive." She looked at him as she spoke with an expression of strange meaning. It was a look that sought to pierce his very soul, and yet which revealed a degree of mental torture that seemed to have reached the barrier that separated it from madness.

"Do not think so meanly of me, as to imagine that I am a legacy-hunter," said Trevor, with much

emotion; "and pray believe that your recovery, or the alleviation of your sufferings, through so humble an instrument in the hands of the Almighty as myself, would be a source of the purest happiness to me through life."

"I do not think meanly of you; I do believe you are sincere," she exclaimed; and added, pressing her hand to her brow, "but forgive my discourtesy—I have been, I am so sorely tried: I suspect every one, and have I not reason? But I will believe two are faithful—Victor and you. Don't be offended at the association; I mean to honour you by it." And she raised the dog which had been fawning at her feet, and loaded it with passionate caresses. "May you never know the desolation of heart," she continued, "which renders a faithful animal the best beloved creature on earth."

"I know this," said Trevor, with an emotion almost of tenderness, "that there is such an inscrutable mystery about the attachment and intelligence of the inferior animals, and of dogs beyond all others, that I do not envy the heart of the man who can make a jest, or think scorn of one of the species."

The weeping lady held out her hand, which Trevor raised to his lips, as a mute pledge of esteem and respect. But when it drooped to her side, the ring I once before mentioned slipped from her thin finger, and rolled on the deck. It was a

large sapphire, encircled with brilliants, and, of course, of great value.

"How strange!" said Mrs. Smith; "I had nearly forgotten the very purpose for which I sought you. Though I have not named you in my will, I do not wish you to be without a memorial of me. That ring is associated with many sacred memories of my parents and my childhood; and there is no other than yourself whom I should wish to own it. My shrunken hand is no longer fit for bright jewels," and she held it up to the light with a mournful smile; "therefore wear it henceforth in remembrance of me, instead of waiting for my death."

Trevor Sefton hesitated, and long demurred at receiving so costly a gift; but it was impossible, finally, to decline one tendered under such circumstances.

CHAPTER IX.

"Oh, this Nature deals
In rare varieties;—a worm converts,
Into a beauteous voyager of air;
And to fulfil her cycle—as you see,
Degrades ethereal being to the worm's!"

J. WESTLAND MARSTON.

THE situation of Trevor Sefton was certainly in many respects an unenviable one. Without pur-

chasing the knowledge by very disagreeable experience, it is hard to understand the discomfort of being intimately associated with a discordant couple—that is to say, after the veil of appearances has been cast aside, and the truth is thoroughly revealed to the looker-on. Not that Mr. and Mrs. Smith had ever been in the habit of quarrelling according to the vulgar sense of the word, which conveys an idea of loud voices and bitter words; and even to the ebullition of passion on the lady's part already described succeeded a calm, which, to a casual observer, might not have seemed very different from that which had preceded it. But Trevor knew otherwise; for he alone, of lookers-on, was conscious of the nature of the provocation, and in how much it differed from ordinary disagreements. Not that he ever learned what had passed between themselves, or how the lady accounted for having ransacked her husband's drawers and writing desk, and possessed herself of the miniature.

Mr. Smith, however, was well aware that she had made a new will; indeed she wished him as well as the witnesses to her signature, to understand that by that act she cancelled the one executed some time ago, and which remained in the hands of her solicitor in London. He guessed too, if he did not know the nature of this recent testament; or perhaps surmised, that he was more harshly dealt with than even was the truth. He had hated his unhappy wife at the time when he had only received

benefits at her hands; hated her with a slowly growing hatred, because life lingered from year to year in its fragile tenement, and stood between him and the free enjoyment of the tens of thousands she had originally bequeathed to him; but hatred is too weak a word to express the passion which now raged in his heart, and to which a thousand trifling circumstances seemed hourly to add fuel. Like all those unhappy half gifted beings whose aspirations are high, and powers of achieving greatness but moderate, he was morbidly sensitive on the point of general approbation and general admiration, a vain man without the self-sustaining principle of proper pride. And to be humbled in the eyes of a boy physician and a group of mere acquaintances, was it not enough to lash his brain to frenzy? Even the half compassion of one or two of the party who were cognizant of his disappointment, but ignorant of all else, seemed to him worse to endure than would have been expressions of triumph from the fortunate legatee. It seemed as if the ship were too small to be his dwelling place—the deck too narrow a space for his impetuous pacing, and yet as if the measureless blue arch of heaven pressed heavily on his frame, for his eyes were now commonly cast down, and his brows knit into perceptible furrows. He was nursing his vengeance, as a serpent might be supposed to garner his venom for one stealthy deadly stroke.

As may well be imagined, the voyage seemed all

too long to more than one of the party ; and though hailed with different emotions, the rugged peaks of Madeira were welcomed by all. It may be that Trevor felt a satisfaction in knowing that the extreme point of distance from those he loved best was gained—the chain stretched to its longest. The poor invalid looked to that softer clime perhaps with a lingering hope more strong than reason would have sanctioned; perhaps only as the scene of greater freedom than it was possible, to know in the confinement of the ship. After all, it is a great thing for an ill-used wife to have the command of a full purse—for gold is power in a great many ways; and never so much as now had Mrs. Smith blessed her father's memory, and revered his foresight, for having put it out of her power to be generous in the days of a foolish delusion.

On their landing, she deputed Trevor to make all necessary arrangements, begging him to engage an excellent house in the best situation; but no sooner were they settled therein, than it became evident the lady intended to lead a life as independent as possible from that of her husband. She had taken letters of introduction to one or two families resident at Funchal, and, though so great an invalid, took an opportunity of making their acquaintance. I think, however, there is not much wonder that she was looked on as an "odd" person. Whenever she and her husband were seen together—which, to be sure, was now but seldom—his manner towards her was that of great kindness and attention, but which

she always rebuffed with open contempt and rudeness. The glassy brilliance of her eye was a token of the disease that, vampire like, was preying upon her, but it lent a strange effect to the flashes of indignation which she darted from time to time upon him; and though no one who has once recognised the fearful look of insanity could have mistaken her expression for it, her acquaintances were of the happy many who have no such dreadful knowledge. In short, when rumours were heard—though with whom originating seemed not distinctly known—rumours that the poor invalid was “not quite right in her mind,” people seemed little surprised, and some even observed, in their utter ignorance of that fearful calamity which so often heightens, not contradicts, the just impressions of the mind, that “mad persons generally take an aversion to those they have loved best, and no doubt this was the reason she behaved so strangely to her husband.” Adding, of course, much commiseration for his distress of mind.

Trevor Sefton was not the first to hear these reports; neither was he quite the last; and they had reached him, and been contradicted too, with something very like indignation, when Mr. Smith took an opportunity one day of drawing him into a private conference.

“Much as there has been,” he exclaimed in a tone that was intended to be half sarcastic, “much as there has been in Mr. Sefton’s deportment since I have had the honour of his acquaintance, for which

I can find neither clue nor precedent, I must confess nothing has surprised me so much as the intelligence which has just reached me."

"May I ask what that is?" said Trevor.

"Simply your denying in the most unequivocal terms a fact which must have been for a long time self-evident to you as well as to all the rest of the world."

"May I beg of you to be a little more precise for I am quite in ignorance of what it is you mean."

"Well, then, I am at a loss to know your motive for peremptorily denying the real state of my wife and your patient." And as he spoke he looked furtively at Trevor, anxious to watch the effect of his own words, and yet not daring boldly to meet the glance of the other.

"I have never denied, even to Mrs. Smith herself," exclaimed Trevor, who did not even yet comprehend the allusion, "I have never denied the exceedingly precarious state of her health, although I trust there is no immediate danger."

"But you deny that she is mad—perfectly insane!" exclaimed the husband, with a forced laugh, which was meant to conceal the tremor of his mouth; a tremor which the cowardly villain could not altogether control.

Trevor started as if he had been stung; for the villanous scheme, in all its force and intricacy, flashed upon him in an instant.

"I denied it, Sir," he replied with as much

calmness as he could assume, "because there is not one atom of truth in the report. Ill in body, your lady is; ill in mind I fear she may be; but her reason has remained unshaken—undimmed—and that too through one trial, at least, which might have unnerved the bravest and strongest." And as he spoke the last words, he looked at his companion, whose eyes, however, were bent to the ground.

"Come, come," said Mr. Smith, appearing not to understand him, "I see how the matter stands, and after all you are quite justified in driving the best bargain you can. I confess it will not be easy to prove her insanity without your help; a help that will cost you but little trouble, and for which I am willing to pay liberally. Suppose we say two hundred a-year secured for your life, from the day I take possession of my poor wife's property under the will made ten years ago, when she was perfectly in her senses you know?"

"Is there to be no measures to the insults to which poverty is subjected," exclaimed Trevor with indignation, "that you should dare to make so infamous a proposal to me! But I thank you for it in one sense, for your villany has overreached itself, and the fact of this attempt at bribery would be evidence against you, should you unhappily find more supple instruments of your wicked will."

"Sir, you are insolent."

"A conference of this kind," returned Trevor

Sefton, "can scarcely be made a question of insolence or courtesy. It is sufficient Mr. Smith—Mr. *Geoffrey* Smith, that I know you; that I know those antecedents of your life which you have sedulously concealed from your wife, but which, out of compassion to her feeble health and wounded affections, I have not betrayed to her."

It would have been a fearful study for a painter or an actor to have watched the agonised and deepening expression on the countenance of the guilty man, as Trevor spoke. Though indignant at the iniquities of which he really knew, it was not till afterwards that he suspected there must be some yet more terrible secret, the memory of which had so suddenly stricken and subdued a man hardened in guilt. It is thus, indeed, that conscience is the coward-maker! Had Mr. Smith known that his desertion of Hester Clifford was the chief antecedent to which Trevor alluded, he would have laughed to scorn his threats of denunciation. But, instead of this, his cheeks became of a livid paleness, his trembling hands seemed to clasp and writhe together involuntarily; while, from his blanched lips the only words that struggled forth were, "Mercy! Mercy!"

"As you are just so will I be merciful," replied Trevor, perceiving his advantage in an instant.

"It is to atone—to make amends, that I long for wealth," exclaimed the other.

"Atone! — make amends! — how?" began

Trevor, but he wisely paused, too well content with the influence he had gained to hazard losing it by any indiscretion. Fortunately, too, a summons from Mrs. Smith broke off the conference, and thus gave him time for reflection and decision on the line of conduct he should adopt. Lonely and companionless as he had often felt, never had he seemed so much to need some faithful friend, of whom to seek counsel, or to whom, at least, to tell the strange position in which he was placed. Oh! for the advice of the warm-hearted, but shrewd and clear-headed Dr. Graham; or the counsel of his beloved mother, whose wisdom was always that which is nearest to inspiration—the wisdom of the heart; or, most desired of all, the dear sympathy of his gentle yet firm-hearted betrothed, whose love, even in absence, was a star of hope, a light to cheer and comfort, and whose sympathy was to his own thoughts even

“As a rich goblet to bright wine,
Which else had sunk into the thirsty earth.”

And thus, for awhile, must I leave him, and ask the reader once more in thought, to cross the blue ocean, and watch how events were wreathing themselves in London.

CHAPTER X.

"I will not throw the sceptre down, now that its power I know."

A S.

"MY dear Catherine," said Mr. Joyce to his daughter one day, "you would do me a great favour, if you would behave to Mr. Sefton this evening with a little more cordiality than you generally show. And, above all, do not choose the opportunity of his presence to descant on the merits of his younger brother; who may be all you say, but I suspect the theme is very far from being agreeable to my friend; and believe me, the reasons which urge me to conciliate Mr. Charles Sefton are not trifling ones."

He sighed as he spoke, and turned his head from the windows, although the increasing gloom of a January afternoon of itself lent a friendly shade to his countenance. By a brighter light, however, it might have been seen that he was considerably altered during the last few months. His clothes hung loosely about him, and showed that he was thinner; his eyes seemed sunken; and anxious thoughts and added cares had impressed themselves legibly on his countenance.

Catherine, on the contrary, looked better than ever. The autumn sojourn on the coast had

restored the roses of health to her cheeks; and there was a calm light in her eye, which until lately had seldom dwelt there—the light that is kindled by the consciousness of serenity and the enjoyment of home affections. For Catherine Joyce had at length exorcised the demon of suspicion, and had permitted her warm heart to cling tendril-wise round her kind step-mother and young sisters.

“ Dear Papa, what is it you mean?” she replied, laying her hand on his arm and looking intently at him—for she had been startled by the peculiar earnestness of his manner, and now for the first time remarked how ill he was looking. So gradual had been the change, that there was little wonder those about him had failed to observe it.

“ I mean, my love, just what I say.”

“ I think you mean more than you say,” she exclaimed, in return; “ and if you tell me what your reasons are, I shall be able to shape my conduct much more cleverly by the light of such knowledge than in the darkness of my present ignorance.”

Mr. Joyce sank back in an easy chair, with the air of one who was going to repose a confidence; and Catherine drew a low stool to his side, and seated herself, partially averting her head for a reason of her own.

“ You must be aware, Catherine, that Mr. Sefton’s attentions have been somewhat particular—in short, that he admires you very much.”

"If it be so, Papa, the admiration is all on one side, for I do not like him at all."

"I hardly know whether to be glad or sorry of this," returned her father. "Mr. Sefton is not every thing I most esteem; at the same time—as far as worldly prospects are concerned—it would be an excellent match, for he is known to be enormously rich. It is said that he has almost doubled his fortune, by successful speculations, within the last year."

"I have no desire to share it," said Catherine, gently but firmly.

"And be assured I will never urge you to do so."

"Thank you, thank you," she exclaimed, pressing her father's hand; and she added, not without a blush, "this is most kind after the pain I have already cost you."

"Nevertheless," he continued, "I must own to you that I am so deeply involved in money transactions with Mr. Sefton, that I am anxious to conciliate him in every way—and not even to irritate him by such a seeming trifle as a young girl's cold reception of him in her father's house."

"Involved in money transactions!"

"Yes, Catherine, it is but too true. The speculations into which I was persuaded to enter have not been so fortunate as his own; he has supplied me with the means of meeting my liabilities, and the consequence is, I am so much in his power that all I possess would scarcely meet my obligations

to him ; and though at the worst I trust to escape the disgrace of being insolvent, it is but too probable that we must reduce our establishment, and curtail our expenses in every possible manner."

" But I shall soon be of age—there will be my fortune to meet this extremity," she exclaimed with generous enthusiasm.

" Heaven bless you for the thought, my child !" and the recollection of how nearly he had once been asking her to risk her property in the very speculation which had turned out so unfavourably, lent a tenderness to his tone ; and it may be there flashed through his mind a rapid view of the strange evil-seeming events out of which so much good had come, namely—the prevention of his applying to her on such a subject—even if his adviser had continued to urge it, which he had not—and the restoration of her affections to their proper channel. " Heaven bless you for the thought, Catherine ; but I have had a bitter lesson, by which you may profit, and not a farthing of your principal will I touch."

" Well, well, we shall see. Meanwhile I promise to behave very civilly to Mr. Sefton ; he shall take me down to dinner, and I will sit next him. And," she added with a sort of levity that people sometimes assume to hide deep feeling, " to heighten the effect of my civility, I must make myself very charming, and so will run away now, and think of preparing to dress."

It was quite true, however, that Catherine Joyce

did think a little more than usual about her appearance on that day, and took out two or three dresses from her wardrobe before she could decide which would be the most becoming. But when at last the palm had been awarded to a rich pink watered silk, with which her fine pearls contrasted very admirably, knowing she had abundance of time for her toilet, she sank into a reverie which lasted so long that after all she dressed in a hurry. Two or three carriages had already deposited the dinner guests, and loud knocks were following each other in rapid succession, before she entered the drawing-room, looking a little flushed from haste and excitement, but very radiant and sparkling—the invisible quiver quite full of arrows for conquest.

If that reverie, which had been so deep as to abridge the time she had reserved for her adornment, could have been translated from its unuttered and almost unutterable thoughts, into the clearness of a soliloquy, it would have run something thus, with not a few of the wavering contradictions which might almost be established as the only consistencies of human character :—

“No harm if I should delude him into proposing for me—he is a creature without really a heart to be touched. Or, suppose he has feeling, it would only be revenging the wrong received from one of the sex on another. And yet I could not do this with a nobler character. Oh, no, I should sink myself to the level of the being I despise, and could not meet

the remorse I should feel for having tortured an honest heart ! It is a dangerous game to play, that of the coquette ; and not the nicest in the world. It is like using tools that soil one's fingers : but then my father : to give him time and charm the serpent ! Only till I am of age, though ; and then I can and will do as I like. I wonder if I shall feel amused at the writhing of the slave in his chains—for in my heart I know I can forge them. I wonder if I shall ever be in love again ! Pshaw ! that was not love after all. Only a shock—a plunge—rather invigorating in its after effects than otherwise ; but what an escape that I was not dragged down—down, and utterly stifled by it ! Of this I am sure, that my heart will now be as much more difficult to win, as it will be better worth possessing than it was before the wounds, which, perfectly healed as they are, raise a prejudice against its value in the eyes of very young people, I suppose. Dear Margaret—I must not take her into my confidence ; no, she is a great deal too happy in her love to understand my excuses for a flirtation with her brother-in-law that is to be—selfish, narrow-minded, ugly, money-grubber that he is.” And so she mused on, as I have said before, until she had to dress in a hurry at last.

Susan Clifford had recovered her health and good looks, and something more than her former tone of mind. By dint of many persevering efforts, she had obtained a temporary engagement in the

country, and had left home, accompanied by her mother, to fulfil it. Meanwhile, Mrs. Sefton, and Margaret, on whom Trevor's mother already looked as a dear child—and whose developing character had won the sanction of her judgment in addition to the love which for her son's sake she had been willing to bestow—remained in town, with poor Hester still under the same roof; the trio living, for the present at all events, as one family.

"Letters from Madeira!" was the joyous exclamation of Mrs. Sefton, as she met Margaret almost at the door one day on her return from her daily duties, and the latter knew by the tone of the mother's voice that Trevor was at least well—that the news could not be very bad. "But I am a little jealous," added Mrs. Sefton, with a smile; "yours is much the thicker of the two, quite a packet in fact; and I am all impatience to know if it contains any additional intelligence, or is only"—

"Nonsense!" said Margaret, filling up a moment's pause with an interjectional common-place, but expressing a world of sympathy and emotion in an affectionate kiss.

It would be an unpardonable breach of the most sacred confidence to reveal the contents of the letter which Margaret received with a trembling hand, and hastened to her own chamber to peruse; but it may just be hinted that its bulk was most certainly increased by a minute description of the events which are recorded in a preceding chapter, not

omitting the singular discovery of the identity of Mr. Geoffrey Smith with Hester's early lover. To Margaret, as to some "other self," he poured out those details which made up the sum of his trying position; leaving to her discretion to repeat them to his beloved mother, according as she should judge if the confidence would be to her an additional care, or a consolation to Margaret herself. She felt that it must prove both, but acted most wisely in making a full disclosure to Mrs. Sefton. She had had already learned the outline of Hester's story, and be sure this strange filling up neither lessened her interest in that stricken being, nor indisposed her to endure the fitful fancies and harmless eccentricities of which she was now so often a witness.

And the talk over Trevor's letter had delayed the opening of one which lay on the table for a full hour unregarded, though it proved scarcely less important than the others! The post-mark was faint and blurred, and nobody had guessed that it came Susan. The hand-writing was bolder and larger than hers had ever seemed before; nay, the very letters had taken eccentric forms, sprawling this way and that, as if in an intoxication of freedom. and truly, the hand which formed them had reeled with new and unexpected delight. Many persons profess to judge a stranger's character, and even acquirements, by his hand-writing; and I will not gainsay a power I have seen most strangely exemplified. And this I know, that, by a kindred

but commoner instinct—for it is hardly knowledge—we may always judge of the mood in which the pen has been guided by those with whose writing we are intimately acquainted.

Susan's letter contained but a few sentences ; not more than might easily have been compressed within the smallest gilt-edged flower-bordered sheet that ever winged its way from the warehouse of Dobbs or of De la Rue ; but she had chosen one of large letter paper, and had covered it with her few, but joyously unsteady, hieroglyphics. And the glad tidings ? They were that a new era had opened in her existence—that she was no longer the toiling automaton—the fourth-rate drudge ; but that she had been proclaimed the interpreter of passion—the actress of genius !

If the letter had been penned with trembling fingers, with not less emotion was it perused by Margaret. Hers was that quiet wisdom, not eloquent of words, but deep and true, piercing by its intuitive sense to the facts of things ; and, while her heart overflowed in joyful grateful tears, as she leaned her head on Mrs. Sefton's shoulder, and sank into her open arms, it was with broken sentences that she made her understand how the change must have worked. For Margaret knew that it was the torch of suffering which had carried light into her sister's soul ; which had *kindled to genius* the dormant powers of her mind !

The next day brought a calmer letter ; but one

which only repeated, with more minuteness, the particulars of her success. It told how managers of various theatres had journeyed from far and near to witness her performance, and how their munificent offers had taught her already to appreciate the value of her services. "But," she added, with that high-toned feeling which, alas! does not always abide with the prosperous, "here I shall remain for a month or six weeks at least. I do not forget that dear, good Mr. C—— (who cancelled the agreement by which he might have bound me, and trebled my salary the morning after my first appearance) was the only one of these fine gentlemen who had the discrimination—ahem! vanity, you will say, but I *am* getting very vain—was the only one who had the discrimination to guess at my ability, or who was willing to give a poor, obscure, and struggling girl a chance. I know not which might be the moving influence; perhaps they both combined; and for either or both I owe him a debt of gratitude, which I trust I may never grow so heartless as to forget. Meanwhile, his treasury must be the first I fill. Come to me, Margaret," she continued, "you must come and witness my triumph, and Catherine, for she too will rejoice in it."

How sweet it was for Margaret to have, at such a time, so dear a counsellor as Mrs. Sefton! One who united with the years and experience of a mother, the warm right sympathies which are too

often corroded or chilled by the harsh contact of the world, or the cold hand of time. She, like Margaret, could see, though, perhaps, but dimly at first, the vista which was opening for them; and could divine how much of the cloud of their destiny would be raised, and how much of light would stream in, at the touch of the magician GOLD.

"Let us go, by all means," said Mrs. Sefton; "let us all go. It is the opportunity for which we have so often longed of trying what change of scene might effect for poor Hester. And what could be more likely to rouse her mind from its apathy than participating in this success of her sister?"

"We can afford it too!" exclaimed Margaret, and the phrase from her lips was full of meaning; for she knew that the fable of the Dead Sea apples is seldom more fully realised than when the poor and struggling snatch at a pleasure, a recreation, an appearance beyond their means. "We can afford it," she said, "for not only does this banker's draft from Susan relieve us of all present cares, but her engagements for the next few weeks will bring in enough for a year's requirements." And, literally oppressed with the prospect of ease before them, again she burst into tears. That Catherine Joyce, however, should also be of the party was hoped for by both, and the next day it was proposed. She had already rejoiced in the rejoicings of her friends, and now she pronounced herself "stupid" for not having been the one to originate the excursion to M——.

"Go with you!" she exclaimed, and, clapping her hands with almost childish glee, "yes, and be delighted. And do you know," she added, "a week's absence from home just now will be the most charming thing in the world. Nay, my dear Margaret, don't look so grave or frightened; I have not quarrelled with mamma, or become wearied of my little sisters, or, I believe, done any of the naughty things for which you used to scold me,—but—but I have got another love affair on my hands, and sadly want something to ruffle the course of it." As she spoke she sank into her chair with a mock gravity that quickly melted into a smile, and convinced Margaret that whatever the confidence which was coming might be, it was of a very different nature from the not-to-be-forgotten scene of the preceding year. There was something, however, which jarred upon her feelings when she grew to understand the real state of the case, and that her friend was receiving, if not encouraging, very devoted attentions from the brother of Trevor Sefton, and this without entertaining the remotest idea of rewarding them with her hand—should he ask it. It is true that Catherine's conduct appeared more mysterious than it really was; since she respected her father's secret too much to betray that his entreaty had been the original spring of her actions.

It is not worth while to dwell on the journey to M——, undertaken so hurriedly, that the enjoy-

ments of many sorts which it involved seemed, when they were passed, like a dream. Two incidents, however, must be mentioned. The first was that from one of those long corridors so often found in hotels, Catherine and Margaret beheld—themselves being in deep shadow—Mr. Frederick Drayton, as he descended the wide well-lighted staircase of the hotel, at which they halted for an hour or two, while waiting to be conveyed the last stage of their journey. He was attired, as usual, in an ultra style of fashion, and wore the brightest of polished leather boots, and the most delicate of lemon-colour gloves. That, from behind the curtains of their private box, they looked round at night to discover if he were in the theatre to witness Susan's triumph, displayed, I think, only a pardonable curiosity.

The second incident, however, and one which interested them infinitely more, was the effect that Susan's powerful acting produced upon her sister. Hester's eye kindled with a light which had not been seen there for many years; and, though she trembled with emotion, and even shed tears, her expressions were full of appreciation and of delight; and when she spoke of Susan's altered prospects, her words displayed a degree of good sense, which her friends had looked upon as departed for ever!

CHAPTER XI.

“ Oh Death! and bear away
Whatever thou canst call thine own!
Thine image stamped upon this clay,
Doth give thee that, but that alone!”

LONGFELLOW.

TREVOR SEFTON stood in the chamber of death! Far away in that southern isle, whither, on the wings of hope, so many fading forms have been borne, to find, alas!—a grave. But, as the careless visitor to Madeira, startled for awhile to thoughtfulness, pauses beside the simple inscription which records the fate of youth and beauty, or the costlier tomb which tells of fortune's gifts, it is but a natural fancy to dream that the disembodied spirits have floated back with earnest love and longing affections to the northern homes they so vainly fled, and that even the insensible clay rests not quite peacefully in that soft, but stranger land!

Trevor clasped the hand of the dying woman, and, despite many efforts to control his emotions, tears of heartfelt gratitude and regret fell upon it! The face of Clara Smith, as she gazed upon him at that moment, would have formed a beautiful study for a painter depicting a dying mother, so full of deep and tender affection was its expression. At

the close of her weary life she had found one true and devoted friend, who had been tried, and *not* found wanting; and all the pure and grateful affections of a warm and loving nature—long garnered, it would seem, rather than repressed—flowed forth with a sweet and consoling power. It seemed as if something in her destiny was completed—some want, at last supplied, for which her spirit had long pined. If Providence had willed her recovery, it would have been the sweetest task to have smoothed with her fortune his rugged path; to have loved for his sake the wife he had chosen, and the children he might have. But she knew that the vital powers of her mortal frame were failing, and that her days of life were narrowing to a close. Her soul was at peace with her Creator; and now must her satisfied spirit concentrate its human yearnings into one comprehensive revelation! A revelation; for not until so late a day had she left the actual fulfilment of an intention conceived without Trevor Sefton entertaining a suspicion of the fact.

The chamber of death was rife with the evidences of wealth—seeming like vain and fluttering banners swiftly to be overthrown and bowed earthwards by the King of Terrors! The couch on which rested that sinking frame was of the richest damask; the pillows were covered with the finest lawn; and delicate but costly lace shaded the hollow cheeks, and fell in ruffles half over the emaciated hands.

For many days articulation had been difficult and dangerous, and a tablet of ivory remained by her side, on which to inscribe her wishes. Her faithful dog, with glistening eyes and patient face, nestled watchfully at her feet—not loved less warmly than of old, though a human friend was now prized yet more dearly.

The inscription which the changing face of the tablet at this moment bore, told Trevor Sefton that, with the exception of a few legacies, and three hundred a year to her worthless husband, he was, by a recent will, the sole heir of her fortune!

It was quite evident from her words that, if she did not know in detail how truly and firmly he had been faithful to her, she felt the truth by a spirit-knowledge, and she blessed him, as a mother might bless her son, for opening her heart to its holiest emotions. He had restored to her that which had wandered from her breast, like a lost dove from its home—her Faith in Humanity. Now, without doubt or trembling, she could indulge in fond hopes of the good on earth which her earthly possessions would effect in the future;—the high purposes to which she had long willed them, though chained to inaction herself by sickness and circumstance.

It would be in vain to attempt a description of the thronging emotions which swelled at the heart of Trevor Sefton. A heart and imagination alike warm can alone picture them, understanding also, that the intelligence he had just received had come

upon him as a most startling surprise. He had been cognisant of the will made on board a ship, and had never suspected that a more recent one had been executed. Even had he guessed such a thing, as—from certain mysterious interviews with some of her Madeira acquaintances which he now recollected—a more inquisitive person might perhaps have done, he would never have thought of himself as her legatee, after her memorable words that it should be “his interest to keep her alive.” It was unkindness that had taught her tongue its bitterness; and ingratitude had planted suspicion in a nature the most trusting and generous.

Mrs. Smith still lingered for a few days; during which time she not only communicated to her husband the disposition she had made of her property, but caused several precautionary measures to be taken which might facilitate the means to be adopted by Trevor in taking possession of it. Calmly as a wearied child falls asleep, she sank at last. She had seemed better in the morning, though well did Trevor know such appearance was really but an expiring flicker. She had spoken a little; she had renewed her forgiveness to her husband kindly and earnestly; had given a trinket which she constantly wore, as the last of many gifts to her weeping maid, and—feat most easily accomplished—had led the conversation to Margaret Clifford, if that could be called conversation which was rather a narration her written questions had drawn forth.

A sweet smile rested on her wan features ; for her parting spirit was refreshed by the knowledge that she had conferred happiness. Such were her last earthly thoughts.

The last sorrowful rites were over ; and the house, made sacred by the presence of Death, was once more so much of common space, in which men could talk of common things, and in a voice no longer hushed.

The husband and the heir were together ! The eyes of the former were cast down, and it would have been hard to judge from features well disciplined to mask the soul's emotions, what passions were at play within. Remorse or hatred, penitence or revenge ? Trevor Sefton did not pause to consider which of them swayed the hour ; he could not have done it, for his own heart had been so melted and moulded within the last few days, that reason seemed to be in a state of chaos—but a chaos out of which were to evolve new and beautiful combinations—a chaos over which floated the Spirits of pity, and hope, and pardon.

He rested his hand kindly on the shoulder of the other, as brother might lean upon brother. "Why will you not let me be your friend ?" he said ; and the voice was—the voice of those Spirits.

"My friend !" exclaimed Geoffrey Smith, in a tone of bitterness. Yet his lip quivered.

"Yes, friend ! unless you can think of a better term and adopt it."

The dark eyes were raised ; eyes in which a lurking sarcasm seemed driving back the evidences of some healthful emotion. It conquered, too, for the moment, for he said, bitterly, "What think you of judge?"

"I am no judge," returned Trevor, mournfully ; "there is One on High—One who will weigh Circumstance and Temptation in a balance more even than our frail fellow-mortals can hold."

The evil-doer for years, hardened in guilt, burst into tears !

That was a long and memorable interview, in which the wretched man poured out the Confession of his Life. It will be enough to take up the thread of the discourse towards its close. Hope spoke more loudly than her sister Spirits now, in the voice of Trevor Sefton.

"The first thing, then, to restore your peace of mind is to refund the thousand pounds, and recal that unhappy draft"—

"Which I FORGOT," interrupted the other. "Oh ! to be able to breathe that word of fire, that has burnt and branded itself into my heart for a dozen years !"

"This shall be done as quickly as my instructions—or myself—can reach London. Secondly, before entering some foreign service, you wish one parting interview with Hester Clifford. Is this wise?"

"It is selfish, perhaps," murmured the other, "but if you knew—if you could comprehend—how

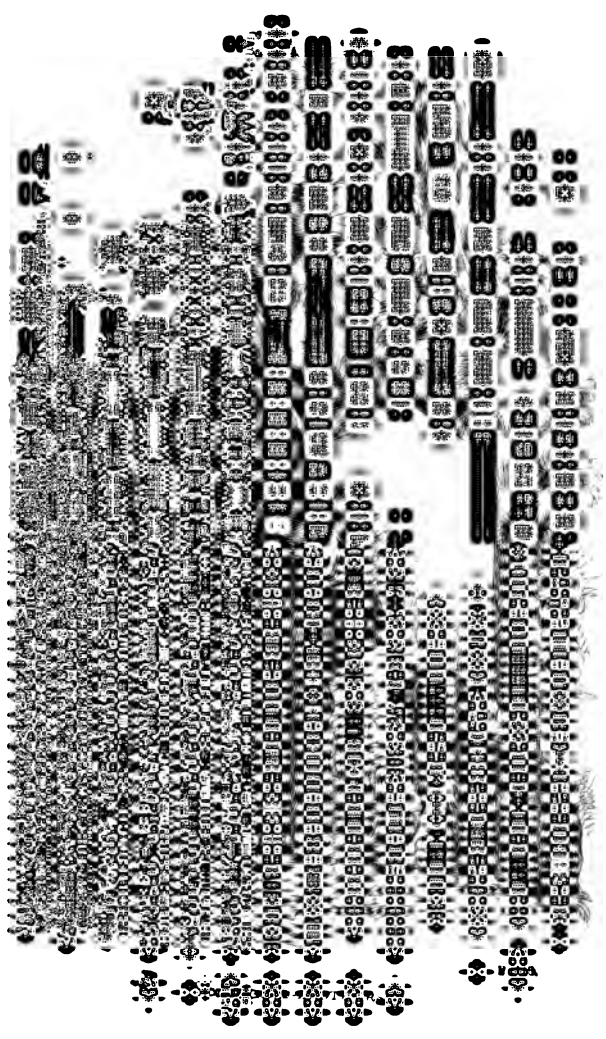
that one memory has dwelt in my soul, like a jewel amid corruption. Even now, imbecile, faded as she is, if she would wed me—if I might, in part, atone”—

“Think not of it,” said Trevor hastily; “I have told you Death is at her heart. And every letter I receive from England confirms my words. Believe me, she is fading like an autumn leaf.”

But few preparations were necessary for leaving the island. Trevor had secured a berth in a vessel which was to sail for England almost immediately, but not the same in which Mr. Smith was to return.

It seemed to be tacitly understood that it would be pleasanter for them to part company, and be perfectly independent of each other, than to adopt the opposite plan. Trevor, anxious for all reasons, to return home, was to have been the first to quit Madeira.

It was the evening before the vessel was to sail—the evening of a warm spring day. All his effects were on board, except a valise, which contained some valuables and papers of importance. He had one last and tearful visit to pay—it was to the grave of his benefactress. He lingered and lingered, as if loth to quit the spot, till the sinking sun warned him that the sudden night of the South would be quickly upon him. What crowding memories of past trials, what tender recollections of the dead, what high resolves, what radiant hopes, swelled in his heart, words cannot tell. At last, as with a



quick determination, he moved away, yet paused awhile to gather a few wild flowers which grew near the spot: these, as he perceived an acquaintance approaching, he thrust into his bosom.

This acquaintance was an Englishman, a white-haired man, but bowed with sorrow more than years. Ten years before, an adored wife had faded and faded before his eyes, till Death snatched her from his loving hold; a daughter, taken by the same vampire-like disease, lay in a grave near that of Clara Smith; and now was he watching, with almost frantic love, his only remaining child, a youth of seventeen, whom he had brought hither, with the lost sister, for the winter, but was now about taking back to England.

"I suspected I should find you here, Mr. Sefton," he exclaimed, removing his hat, perhaps out of deference to the sacred spot, "when they told me you were from home. I come to ask a boon of you; a boon which aged ignorance asks of youthful knowledge; a boon which a month ago I would have bargained for with the yellow GOLD—that which can purchase so much, and yet so little! But the world says you are richer than I now—and so—and so—I beg your charity!"

Trevor Sefton was not of a nature to remain unmoved at such an address; and yet a terrible guess close upon the truth rushed to his mind. He had prescribed for the youth in question on more than one occasion; and the dread consumption, less

deeply rooted than it had been in the sister's case, had yielded perceptibly to his remedies.

"What is it I can do," he replied, "for the few hours I remain on the island? The vessel in which I have engaged my passage sails to-morrow."

"No, no; it must not be," exclaimed the other. "One little fortnight—only two weeks—only fourteen nights and days—and then we all return together. I have striven for berths in the ship in which you say you are to go; but not one, not one is to be found. Oh stay, and save my child. It is useless to bribe you with Gold: what, what can I say?" And then the old man clasped his hands, and burst forth in a torrent of passionate entreaties.

Trevor Sefton was grieved—grieved beyond expression, with a heart-sick disappointment. In his present mood, the delay of a fortnight seemed the delay of half a life; and yet, putting aside the exaggerated expressions and belief of the father, he could not conceal from himself the fact that the son was in precisely the condition when a single error in the treatment of his disease might prove fatal. One month ago! Yes: were he as poor in fortunes as then he was, full well he knew that, for some comparatively trifling money payment, he would have bartered his freedom, deferred his hopes, and bent every endeavour towards the fulfilment of new duties. And was he to with-

hold that for charity which he would have yielded for gold?

Was Trevor Sefton to fall before the rich man's first temptation?

No. "I will stay!" he exclaimed; and the grateful Father did not note the sigh which followed.

It was more fruitful in consequences than strange in itself, that Geoffrey Smith—almost equally eager to leave Madeira—should occupy the berth engaged for Trevor Sefton, and sail on the morrow!



CHAPTER XII.

"Sure she saw that I did love her,
Sooth 'twas plain as plain could be."

C. H. HITCHINGS.

CATHERINE JOYCE and Mr. Charles Sefton were *tête-à-tête*. An event had just occurred which is either the momentous one of a life, or a very awkward affair—the gentleman had proposed. To own the truth, Catherine did not appear to advantage; though, so far as mere person was concerned, she had never looked better, for the rich beauty of health bloomed in her cheek, and she was attired in the most becoming costume in the world—an elegant morning one. Nevertheless, she seemed involuntarily to shrink into the shadow of the window curtains, and so far from evincing one particle of

feminine triumph, appeared thoroughly mortified, and ashamed of herself.

"You have used me ill, Miss Joyce," he said, in a tone in which real feeling was leavened by no small degree of bitterness; "you have used me in a manner—I was going to say—unworthy of yourself. But I was wrong to think there was one woman in the world superior to the perfidy and meanness of her sex."

Catherine was silent; she did not even raise her eyes, but continued her employment of the last five minutes, namely, playing with the links of her watch-chain. Mr. Sefton proceeded rather in the form of an angry reprimand, than as if he expected an answer.

"You have received, with something more than complacence, attentions too marked for them to have been mistaken by you. Aware of the influence you have for months possessed over me, you have allowed it to ripen to a deep and ardent attachment, for the sake of enjoying the petty triumph"—

"Oh, no—no—no!" interrupted Catherine.

"How otherwise can I read the riddle of your conduct?" he exclaimed.

"I did not know—that is—I did not think you were really attached to me," stammered the poor girl; "I fancied—I thought it was my fortune, such as it is, which had"—

"Well, it was your reputed wealth which first drew me to your side; but, like many a man so

attracted, I have learned to love the woman better than her gold. And you, Catherine Joyce, you are too completely a woman not to have known this; raise your eyes, look at me, and deny it if you dare."

Involuntarily she obeyed; she was not weeping, but her eyes glistened with restrained tears.

"To prove to you," he continued, in a somewhat gentler tone, "to prove to you how little money has entered into my consideration of you, within these few days I have transacted business with your father, in which, for your sake, I have accommodated him with many thousands. And this, too, at a time, when, from unforeseen losses, money bears with me almost a cent. per cent. value."

"You have done this?" exclaimed Catherine, seriously and collectedly.

"I have."

Catherine raised her hand to her brow, and swept back the braid of hair which seemed to oppress her with its weight. "This must be repaired," she said after a moment's pause; "I can do it; I can refund the money."

"There is no need—it is not worth while. I asked your hand, and do not wish a compromise between it and your fortune."

That had been no "fire of straw," no boyish flame, which had taught Charles Sefton's tongue—and from his heart—to speak thus!

"It must be," said Catherine, firmly, "indeed it must;" and she rose from her seat as she spoke.

"Oh, sir! oh, Mr. Sefton! you would not judge me so harshly if"—She paused, coloured, and grew confused. She felt that she could have died rather than descend to the poor subterfuge her feelings had drawn her so near. She could not accuse her father.

"If what, madam? You have encouraged my devoted attentions for months, yet now you positively and definitively reject my suit. What more is to be said?"

"Let us be friends," she murmured, and held out a trembling hand. He took it—pressed it warmly—raised it half way to his lips—then flung it almost roughly from him, exclaiming, "No—no—we can't be friends!"

He rushed from the drawing-room, leaped down the stairs, and was in the street in a few seconds.

And Catherine! she sank upon the floor, crushed and crouched, as it were, into a shapeless heap, from the overpowering sensations of shame, bitter remorse, and compassion for the anguish she knew she had inflicted. Truly had the wrong she had suffered from one been revenged on another. Truly had Charles Sefton received a wound from the hand which should have been the last to inflict it!

Catherine, however, soon roused herself from the indulgence of unavailing regrets; roused herself to action; her first step being to seek an interview with her father. It was a very painful one. Both parties felt that they had been to blame; yet, for this very reason, they tacitly avoided censuring one

another; though each took up the defensive to a certain extent.

"Really, Catherine," said Mr. Joyce, "I have latterly thought it possible you might accept Mr. Sefton. At times I have fancied you not indifferent to him; and, had such been the case, I should have felt it my duty not a second time to thwart your inclinations. Besides, he has behaved very kindly to me; and, whatever suspicions might once have been started, I have every reason to consider him a very honourable man. As for family quarrels, they are nothing to us; and, for that matter, strangers never get to the rights of them."

"Simple facts, papa, even in family disagreements, speak for themselves. No, no; I cannot delude and excuse myself with the idea that I ever thought of accepting him. It has taught me a bitter lesson—a lesson I ought to have known before—that there is no middle course; that a girl, to act honestly, must either discourage or encourage the evident suitor. And I to have done this—I who have always so hated and despised a coquette!"

"I know that," said her father, adding, though perhaps scarcely aware of the great truth of his remark, "you are by far too earnest a person to be one."

"And yet I have behaved like a coquette of the worst sort. Papa, you must promise me one thing; never again to reproach me with my former folly; all that, believe me, looks fair and innocent compared

with this despicable deception. At worst, it arose from the warm affections and trustfulness of youth."

"Have I reproached you, Catherine?"

"No; you have not. But I feel if you were so to do, I could not bear it now. With regard to my fortune releasing you from all your engagements to Mr. Sefton, it is a thing which I insist on, and which can alone restore to me my self-respect. Two-thirds of my property will still be mine; enough for independence—enough to assist, with my income, the family means, until you can work yourself free from the consequences of these foolish speculations."

Mr. Joyce was far from remaining unmoved at his daughter's right resolves, or the generous devotion of a third of her fortune to the fulfilment of them; but he was quite incapable of understanding her feelings, as he had always been of comprehending her character. Poor Catherine! Surely it is not the least evil of the many shapes of domestic uncomfot—not to say unhappiness—to be among those who never judge of anything but one's actions, who never penetrate to the inner world of the heart, which is, in many cases, the more real of the two. But Mr. Joyce was an every-day sort of person, neither any better nor much worse than his neighbours, and the pen has played falsely if he be not depicted as such.

"If Margaret Clifford had been in London," thought Catherine to herself—she did not say it—

"I wonder would her counsel have prevented things going so far! But I will write and give her the unvarnished tale; and well I know I shall have the consolation of her approval of to-day's proceedings."

Such a letter was written the following morning. But the post crossed which brought one from Margaret to her friend, making extracts from a brief and hurried letter from Trevor Sefton, which he had penned immediately after the death of his benefactress; relating, of course, the consequences of that death to himself, and telling of his proposed speedy return to England!

CHAPTER XIII.

"My thought alone a change has known,
I love no more! I love no more!"

W. C. BENNETT.

It is no longer in a home where poverty was struggling with appearance, and where taste and refinement were harshly jostled by the stern necessities and realities of existence, that the reader must picture the Cliffords. No; the unequivocal success of the young actress had surrounded her family with every substantial comfort. She had fulfilled a short engagement in Dublin, another in the north of England, and was again acting with the greatest applause

at M——, where her genius had first been acknowledged. A pleasant and commodious house had been engaged for a couple of months; and Mrs. Sefton, as well as Susan's mother and sisters, were residing with her. A great change had taken place in Hester. In due proportion, as her mind had seemed to regain something of its long-lost power and clearness, the frail body had shrunk and faded. A stranger would have thought her on the brink of the grave. Nevertheless, the intelligence that once again beamed in her face so changed its expression, that she looked seven years younger than before; and now it was easy to understand that she had been beautiful. Still the pencil was her chief recreation when she had strength to use it; but her inclination for horrible subjects seemed at last to have departed; and when she did indulge in drawing or painting, it was generally to embody some feminine ideal of hope or happiness. She had witnessed Susan's performance in some of her best characters, and had sketched her in them with wonderful power and fidelity. Precious were these productions at the time, but to become yet more so as dear memorials of the dead!

One morning a card was delivered to Susan, with an intimation that the bearer of it requested an interview with "Miss Susan Clifford"—for now she was known by her real name. As she received the card she grew so pale that Margaret, who was with her, thought she was fainting. But she recovered herself sufficiently to bid the servant "show the gentleman

into the drawing-room, and say she would see him in a few minutes." Margaret had flown to her side, and saw in an instant that the card bore the name of "*Mr. Frederick Drayton!*" The paleness of Susan's cheek gave place to a deep flush, and Margaret could not help exclaiming—

"Dear Susan, are you right to see him?"

"Quite right," replied her sister. "What is it that you fear?" and her words were accompanied by so arch a look that it removed all sorts of fear. "And do help me," she added, "to fasten up the plait of my hair—(I must get a stronger comb; the weight of my hair is always pulling it down)—the rest is not much out of curl, is it? Don't laugh, Margaret: I have no wish to look a fright in his eyes, I assure you."

She left her sister very bravely; but, if the truth must be owned, she paused a few moments at the drawing-room door before she gained courage to turn the lock.

Meanwhile that drawing-room must be briefly described. It was a small but elegant apartment. Musical instruments were there, open, as in daily use; new books and new music were lying near; choice flowers made a pleasant atmosphere in the place, and these were in addition to six or eight bouquets which seemed to have been hastily thrust into a large plateau of damp sand, and looked exceedingly like some of last evening's floral offerings to the "*Juliet.*" On the table, too, there chanced to

be a costly bracelet, a present just arrived from the D—— manager, reposing in its half-open morocco case, and looking almost as well as it would do on the white arm of its mistress. In the card-dish lay the cards of some of the first of the "county people" who had paid the graceful homage of rank and wealth to genius; and had he stooped—no one knows if he did—to the reading them, there were three or four notes of congratulation and heartfelt appreciation from admirers of both sexes on the table, left there in neglect, very much as if they were every-day affairs.

Mr. Frederick Drayton's comprehensive mind took in these details almost at a glance; and he thought—to be the husband of a popular actress would be the most delightful thing in the world! especially as he really had liked her before she was famous. Visions of private boxes for bachelor friends, champagne suppers, and Ascot races floated through his mind in charming variety; these broad outlines being filled up with dim shadowings of an *ad libitum* supply of bank notes. Who has not heard of the girl and her basket of eggs? Now, the kick to the basket was just paralleled by Susan turning the handle of the door.

The perfect self-possession of Susan Clifford, and the frigid dignity of manner she assumed, perplexed and embarrassed her visitor to a degree he would hardly have thought possible. Blushes, visible emotion, perhaps tears, he had been quite prepared for;

but this—this calm, collected deportment, it was like a totally unexpected move to a chess-player, and put him out altogether. He stammered forth a few of the expressions he had prepared, but they fell on his own ear with an air of burlesque; while Susan's manner was so cleverly assumed, and carried out with such delicate touches, that it would have defied the most keen-witted looker-on to tell if it were natural or affected. In short, it was the perfect *acting* of the accomplished Actress.

When he tried to explain away his treachery, and renew his protestations of admiration and attachment, she appeared almost to forget that he had ever offered such homage before.

"Ah, yes! I remember now!" she exclaimed, applying a scent-bottle to her nose, and leaning back in her chair with an air of ultra-fine ladyism. "I remember! it was when I was in London; but I never keep letters of that sort; I always put them in my waste-paper basket."

"For the edification of your servants, I presume?" said Mr. Drayton. He was angry if he had dared to show his wrath.

"If they like," drawled Susan, still busy with the stopper of the scent-bottle. "But, really," she continued, "this is great nonsense. You must know there are only two conditions under which I could marry. For rank and wealth, perhaps, I would give up my freedom. To be presented at Court—to have an Opera-box on the grand tier—it would be charm-

ing! And," she added, in the same languid tone, "to drive four divine greys, like the Duchess of V. —really the temptation might be strong enough."

"And the other condition under which matrimony would be tolerable—may I inquire, madam, what that is?"

"Of course, marrying for love. Ah! that would be more charming still. But it is not likely to happen; all the great men I know are married already; and I am sure I could only fall in love with a hero, or a statesman, or a poet, or a painter, or an orator, or ——"

"Or a gentleman," interrupted Mr. Drayton.

"Why, you have named the rarest creature of all! How many have you seen in your life?"

What reply Mr. Frederick Drayton made to this question of arithmetic is not recorded. He soon brought the interview to a close; but not until he had fervently wished there were some way of vanishing through the floor or walls without the preparatory step of leave-taking. He had never felt so insignificant in his life, and for a moment he absolutely staggered under a doubt of his own general powers of fascination. To borrow a term from art, let us make this period of his extraordinary littleness the vanishing point of his existence from the canvass of this history!

"To think that I ever fancied myself in love with that creature," exclaimed Susan, throwing herself into her sister's arms, and hastening to answer Margaret's

eager interrogations. "If I had any doubt upon the subject, I know now that I am perfectly heart-whole. Ah! I did not tell him one truth, though—that for the present I am in love only with—my Art!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there!
There is no fireside, howe'er defended,
But has one vacant chair!"

LONGFELLOW.

"Do not ask me, dearest Margaret—as you love me do not question what has agitated and distressed me," exclaimed Susan Clifford to her sister, a few days after the event related in the last chapter: "I cannot, I will not, tell you."

"But, Susan ——"

"Do as I ask you," continued Susan; "these entreaties only torture me. Send for Mr. C—— this instant; or, if you do not, I will go to him."

"Dear Susan I have sent. But whatever your vexation may be, at least I can give you sympathy. Something in that newspaper which you will not let me see—I know it is. Surely a harsh criticism could not vex you in this way?"

"I am not vexed," said Susan; "do not use the word again. I am anxious, dreadfully anxious; but what about, again I say I will not tell you. Be satis-

fied it is nothing connected with my profession." And apparently to make sure of secrecy for the present, at any rate, she tore a corner from a London newspaper which she held in her hand, and, lighting a taper, consumed the fragment.

Her good friend, Mr. C——, the manager, arrived in a few minutes, and the reader may be admitted to the mystery of the interview which ensued.

"Dear Mr. C——," cried Susan, "you have sometimes expressed yourself as obliged by my humble services; there is an opportunity now for your conferring the deepest obligation on me."

The really grateful manager was eloquent in his expressions of devotion, and the actress continued—

"Fortunately there is no play to-night. I want you to go to London by the very next train. I cannot rest till I have some information which otherwise might not reach me for days. A newspaper, which came by this morning's post, contains intelligence of a dreadful shipwreck. The vessel is the very one in which I know Mr. Trevor Sefton had engaged a passage; and though the names of the passengers are given, and his is not included, you may believe the torturing anxiety I am enduring, for there has been considerable loss of life." And now that poor Susan had shared her sad knowledge with another, she found relief in a burst of tears. The kind-hearted manager, too, gave her his sorrowing sympathy.

"A train will start in half an hour," he exclaimed, "and be assured, my dear young lady, that I will

neither sleep nor rest till I have gained you positive information. It is noble of you to keep this intelligence from your sister; but only what might have been expected from Susan Clifford."

"Do not give me more credit than I deserve," she replied. "I have told you my fears, and now I must tell you my hopes. I am quite certain that the vessel is the one in which Mr. Sefton engaged his passage, but I am also sure that among the names of the passengers who are unhappily lost is that of a gentleman who was to have returned in another ship, and with whom, for certain private reasons, I think it very unlikely Trevor would have sailed. I think I should be positively cruel to fill Margaret's mind with the harrowing fears, which my fortunate first peep at the newspaper has enabled me to keep from her. Better a thousand times that she thinks me selfish, unkind, ill-tempered, what she will, for the next four-and-twenty hours."

The reader is already aware of the circumstance which detained Trevor at Madeira, and how, had he yielded to the "rich man's first temptation," he would have been in the ill-fated ship. Strange was the destiny that for once spared the young and the good and the gifted and the happy; and engulfed, instead, let us hope, a repentant sinner, but one for whom the world had no bright promises, and life apparently no future sunshine. After a tedious passage, partly owing to the incapacity of the captain, the vessel struck one stormy night on a

hidden reef of rocks, when absolutely in sight of the English coast. Geoffrey Smith was one of those whom a heavy sea had swept from the wreck, and the next morning the murderous waves laid his lifeless body on the beach.

Meanwhile, Trevor Sefton had really embarked in a fine fast-sailing packet, which arrived off Gravesend the very day that Susan's friend was busy at "Lloyd's," inquiring the particulars of the lost merchantman; and learning from some of the officials that the packet was coming up the river, his own sagacity prompted him to go on board, hoping, what proved the truth, that Trevor might be there; or, at the worst, that some sure intelligence might be gained.

It would be in vain to attempt a description of Trevor Sefton's feelings on learning the fate of Geoffrey Smith; and, while deeply grateful for his own preservation, his heart yearned and softened towards the dead even more than it had done at their parting. His first impulse was to accompany the manager to M——, without the delay of an hour; but wealth has its penalties as well as its privileges, and there were some urgent reasons to induce a few hours' stay in London. Finally, he wrote a few lines to Margaret, and also a short note to his mother, and entrusting them to Mr. C——, —happy messenger!—shook him warmly by the hand more as if he were parting from an old friend than the acquaintance of a couple of hours.

"This is Saturday," he exclaimed; "tell them to look for me on Monday."

It must surely be one of the penalties of wealth to have a "man of business" to help take care of it, or, rather, to be obliged not unfrequently to listen to the (except to the initiated) unintelligible jargon of a lawyer's discourse! Trevor was already in correspondence with the solicitor of his late friend and benefactress, who, though a shrewd lawyer, was, to do him justice, a strictly honourable man. A novice, like his new client, to whom the absolute possession of tens of thousands of pounds seemed still to ring in his ears like the voice of a dream, could scarcely have been in better hands.

Trevor reached Lincoln's-inn about five o'clock, and the result of his self-introduction and ten minutes' discourse was, that he accepted his lawyer's impromptu invitation to share a family dinner in Guildford-street, whither, in company of a certain portentous-looking tin box, the pair were conveyed as quickly as a jaded cab horse was disposed to take them. The wife and daughter had a hint from "Papa" not to sit very long after dinner; coffee, sent into the dining-room, followed quickly on dessert, and yet the *tête-à-tête* of the gentlemen continued till midnight.

It was as Trevor Sefton suspected. He had become the holder of certain securities to which his brother's name was attached, to the amount of ten thousand pounds, which, if not redeemed in three

days, would become forfeit. Moreover, he learned—from those reports which circulate in a given circle long before they reach the ear of the general public—much as in the physical world there are signs which precede the great convulsions of nature—that Charles Sefton was on the brink of ruin—that his engagements trebled the means he could possibly have at his disposal.

It was the following day—Sunday morning; and in choosing for the time of his visit the hours of morning service, Trevor Sefton knew the habits of his brother too well to have any doubt about finding him at home.

The house was strange to him; he had never crossed its threshold; but, if one might aver such a contradiction, he had grown used to strange things lately. He was unknown to the servant; but, announcing himself, “Mr. Trevor Sefton—your master’s brother,” he followed on the heels of that functionary without hindrance or denial. Consequently, the brothers stood face to face, without there having been a moment’s preparation for the interview on the part of the elder. And they had never met since that summer-day on which the one had been turned penniless adrift! Both looked older; but Time, which had somewhat bronzed the cheek of Trevor, had ennobled his expression, and matured his form. With his brother it was very different. Not only common cares but anguish of mind had furrowed his face, and set its impress there; and his

thick dark hair was assuming an iron-grey tinge. He was attired in a loose dressing-gown; and though writing materials were before him, and papers strewed the table, at the moment Trevor entered he was intently studying an anatomical figure. As the door opened he threw a silk handkerchief across a chair which was near him; but the very action pointed that he did it to conceal a brace of pistols.

Charles Sefton had sunk to the last refuge of the infidel coward—he contemplated suicide!

A half-defined suspicion of the truth crossed Trevor's mind, and it might be rendered his voice a little tremulous. The host had risen, and had received his visitor with a slight inclination of the head. His face had changed to a deathlike paleness, and he seemed literally unable to speak.

"Brother," said Trevor, holding out his hand, "it was GOLD that parted us, let it make atonement, and bring us together again."

"What do you mean?" gasped the wretched man; but he had given his hand, and Trevor had not relinquished the grasp.

"I mean," returned he, "that I am the holder of these securities; but that I give them up to your possession, trusting to your honour to discharge the debt should a day of brighter fortunes arrive. I add this clause because I look upon the property I have inherited as a solemn trust, by no means to be devoted to selfish gratifications, and it would be one were I to ask you to accept as a gift what

"I now offer as a conditional loan." As he spoke Trevor laid the papers on the table. Charles Sefton had recognised them in a moment; and while he staggered back to his chair, he clutched them up as if they were a prize which might yet escape from his hands.

"What is it all about?" he exclaimed. "The fortune you have inherited? What do you mean?"

And Trevor briefly told the story; at least as much of it as the world had a right to know. It seemed the strangest tale the usurer had ever heard. "Well, people can't take their money out of the world" was a truism he repeated more than once, though whether he thought the fact a subject for rejoicing or regret he did not specify.

Though his heart was cold and selfish to a degree beyond the imagining of the generous, it had some leaven of humanity, and having such, was not insensible to a nobility of conduct he could never have imitated. It is not too much to say either that his unreturned but deep and sincere attachment to Catherine Joyce had humanised him in a manner no other sort of affliction would have been likely to do. Perhaps he best showed his gratitude to Trevor by explaining to him truthfully the state of his affairs, by which it appeared that this generous aid would give him the time he wanted to meet the losses of a gambling speculation. Trevor did not extract promises from him for his future safety, but he hoped strongly that so worldly a man would profit by so worldly a lesson.

It is not to be supposed that the brothers can ever be friends in the dear and rich acceptance of the word, but they are no longer foes or strangers!

Most kind and gentle reader—for such you are, if you have really lent your patient fancy to all the shifting scenes of this history—will you pause with me for a little while in the happy home of Trevor and Margaret!

I will not weary you with a dull account of the wedding, or of the dresses of the bride and her friends. Susan Clifford and Catherine Joyce, so singularly connected by past events, were Margaret's bridesmaids on the occasion; and if it be any satisfaction to be assured of the truth, I can positively affirm that no past memories exist which could at all interfere with the bestowal of their own fair hands, should the fit persons appear as suitors; though it must be confessed that they are considerably more fastidious and difficult to please than they were a few years ago. Trevor and Margaret have been married some time; and though, as a general rule, it is a very bad plan for parents to reside with their married children, they have never for a moment regretted that Trevor's mother is their dear and honoured guest. To be sure, a large house with its many rooms affords opportunities for privacy that the poor gentleman's "genteel residence" seldom commands; but were they reduced to poverty to-morrow, its cold

touch would only draw those three hearts—if possible—more closely together.

Hester Clifford died a few months after her sister's marriage, but not until she had heard every particular of the career of Geoffrey Smith; she had the satisfaction of knowing that, by the most skilful management the wrong he had done to a mercantile firm which had trusted him had been repaired, the forged draft recovered, and his name rescued from the chances of public posthumous disgrace. Who shall fathom the heart? By her own desire, all that remained of Hester Clifford was interred in the obscure churchyard of a Hampshire village, beside the corpse which the "waves had given up." But let the dead rest free from reproach, as from the world's sin and sorrow, and turn we once again to the living.

The position of Trevor Sefton is peculiarly fortunate. Would, indeed, for the interests of humanity, that such a position were less peculiar, less an exception than it is. The man of wealth—and of the influence that wealth gives—who has known the struggles of poverty; the medical professor who is independent of all patronage, and therefore can look Truth in the face, and listen to her teaching, no matter how strange the garb she wear; who, though startled sometimes at her appearance, is not repelled from his search, even though charlatans have mimicked her guise, till Truth herself is hooted at and abused, and compelled to

veil her loveliness. But she is indestructible. Ages pass over in wrath or in silence, while she slumbers on; Time alone can remove her veils.

No matter what a man be called—poet, or philosopher, astronomer, or anatomist, the searcher mid the petals of a flower, or the analyser of a drop of water—let him work at unshrouding TRUTH, and the meanest labourer in such a cause is greater than the world's mightiest conquerors!

It is good for all such to have some share of GOLD, for IT gives to them ease and leisure. And oh! may the People feel that they cannot buy ease and leisure for such workers too dearly!

Trevor Sefton has a helpmeet who has been tried like himself, and is worthy of him. Commonplace acquaintances—but they mix very little with such—think them both remarkably clever people; are somewhat afraid of them, perhaps; and would quite wonder at the little weaknesses which belong to warm hearts, and which they do not even struggle against indulging.

In Margaret's dressing-room stands an old-fashioned jewel-case of goodly dimensions, which contains diamonds and other gems of great value; but the setting of these ornaments is so out of date that she never wears them. Trevor talks sometimes of having them reset. But speaking of the jewels always makes them think of their benefactress, and they say they have not the heart to change anything she has worn—yet. At the bottom

of the jewel-case, held more sacred than all the rest of its contents, are a few withered flowers—the reader knows whence they were gathered.

Margaret keeps all the precious things! And, by the way, the guard to her wedding circlet, and one constantly worn, is a certain sapphire ring, also it is hoped held in remembrance.

There is one of their household, too, who must not be forgotten—a spaniel that answers to the name of Victor; that is, when Trevor Sefton calls, for no one else does he think worthy to be followed or obeyed. Even his gentle mistress he endures rather than esteems. I love nearly all dumb creatures, and dogs especially; can watch with almost painful interest their struggling intelligence, but I must own Victor is an unamiable dog. Very much to be respected for his faithful attachment to his departed mistress, no doubt; but not in the least a loveable animal. He snaps and snarls very frequently, and even bites as much as a mumbling old dog with half a set of teeth can bite. And yet Margaret will not reprove him, nor forbid his jumping on the ottomans and sofas, to the great indignation of Mrs. Clifford, who, however, can really find no other fault in the arrangements of her daughter's household!

GERALDINE.

A LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

“ While youth’s keen light is in thine eye,
While each new hour goes dancing by,
While girlish visions are not gone,
And sorrow is almost unknown —” S. R.

GERALDINE HARMER was an only child, and had been petted, caressed, beloved—indulged, if you will—and what the world calls “spoiled,” from infancy. But there is a wiser and better creed than that of the world in general; and it is, that no human being can be spoiled by the government of kindness and affection, be they ever so lavish and warm. One thing, however, it does; just as sunshine develops the colour of flowers and leaves which would have been pale and sickly in the shade, it draws out the deep hues and lines of character; and it may be that the selfishness of the selfish becomes more apparent when such a nature is the recipient of life’s choicest blessings. But who can think of the myriad hearts in which the noblest

qualities, the purest aspirations, and even the most world-enriching talents lie buried like seeds in an Egyptian tomb, for want of the light and heat the affections alone can bestow, and yet grieve for their rays shining—even though they chance to fall sometimes on unworthy objects!

Beautiful as was Geraldine's developed character, I believe her to have been only an average type of her sex, if its early influences were more commonly as favourable. With all the softness and tenderness which belong of right to a woman, she possessed that moral bravery which is sure to be extinguished by a discipline of *fear*, and which for this reason is one of the rarest attributes of character. For my own part, I never hear a harsh word spoken to a child without trembling for the consequences—without dreading that the bloom of perfect and proud integrity may at that moment be brushed away, and the first thoughts of deceit be fanned into being.

Geraldine was about seventeen when she lost her mother, and henceforth home-love seemed centred in her remaining parent. Friends may be very dear, acquaintances pleasant and instructive companions; but it is round our very hearth, under the roof where we rest, and in the daily, hourly intercourse of life that the heart must either be satisfied or not; and human happiness, or a blank where it should be, exist. Blessed Geraldine! still, still for her was home affection. Even grief for the dead, deep, intense as it was, had a gleam of light about it that

was not borrowed from sorrow—like the dark clouds that we often see tinged with a golden sunshine. Every memory of her mother was sweet and sacred—of peace and of gladness. It was at this period that Mr. Harmer changed his residence from an inland town to the coast of Devon. Perhaps local associations have more influence upon us than we are always ready to admit. Geraldine's childhood had been passed amid the soft, rich scenery of the heart of England, where meadows show their brightest, deepest green, and the affluent earth is most lavish of its treasures; where blooming orchards look like the flower-gardens of some gigantic world, and the ripening corn sways heavily in the breeze, drooping beneath the weight of its growing wealth; where the sunny hills, and the fertile valleys, and the gentle streams look up to a changeful sky—to them most benignant—with a fond and grateful smile! The scene had surely been in unison with her own happy, joyous, careless childhood.

Life is broken up into the epochs that emotions make, far more vividly than by the lines of outward actions or events, though often enough they mould or melt into one another. The death of her mother was Geraldine's first sorrow, speedily followed by the change to a sea-side residence; and this—the perpetual presence of the wide horizon—the changeful, restless, slumbering, treacherous ocean—was beautifully appropriate to the new life which was dawning upon her. That one sorrow had opened the

dark door through which so much knowledge steals into the heart—that knowledge taught by suffering, which is the balance in the scale, and forbids even hope to soar too high. Yet she was at the age when, despite all the world can do, life will ever wear a new and bright aspect, if not the brightest Fate has in store. And, as Geraldine sat on the sea-shore, watching the glancing waves that broke at her feet, her musings took that tinge of poetry of which few natures are quite incapable. Sometimes it seemed as if each wave had a story it refused to tell—a tale from the distant climes, whence it had toiled on some strange mysterious mission; or, as she marked the gently-rising tide, obedient to the mistress of the waters, who beckoned from her starry court, her soul seemed lifted by that worship of nature, most reverent as it was, till she saw or created a thousand vague yet beautiful types.

It must not be supposed, however, that Geraldine Harmer's life was that of a recluse, or that she grew to be a mere visionary; far otherwise: for the next six or seven years she mixed a good deal in society, and paid at least one visit in the year to the metropolis. Observation confirmed or contradicted the theories of her young mind; and in her father's constant society and confiding affection she had that support, the absence of which is, I believe, the most fatal deprivation a young woman can know—the support of a stronger mind and more enlarged intellect than her own; that something which she recog-

nises most speedily, and bows to most implicitly, in father, brother, or husband. The metaphor of the oak and the ivy, as applied to the two natures, is beautiful, because it contains so much truth; and woman's fine qualities are only half developed while tottering, as it were, by herself. There is but one condition more pitiable, and that is when she twines herself round some rotten reed, corrupts her own soul by the contact, and sinks into the very mire at last. But the girl who nestles by the side of a wise yet gentle father, or who has the proud privilege of a noble brother's tender friendship, is sheltered from a thousand dangers and temptations. She will be the last to "lose" her heart unworthily, though she may bestow it entirely and wisely.

Not driven, therefore, to any fatal choice by the want of an object to venerate and rely on—so large an element in the *besoin d'aimer*—there is not much wonder that at three-and-twenty Geraldine's heart was still free. It might have been open to those passing thoughts and inclinations which are but as the summer lightning that indicates the pathway of the storm; for youth will have its dreams, and the heart its own promptings. But her peace had never been broken; her soul was yet ignorant of its deepest mysteries.

It was at this time that the accidents of society threw her a good deal with Lionel Weymouth; acquaintance ripened into intimacy both with father and daughter, and intimacy into a friendship founded

on mutual appreciation and esteem. Weymouth was two or three years older than Geraldine, and until a recent period had expected to inherit a fine landed property in the north of England. Without exactly pledging himself to celibacy, Sir George Weymouth had educated the orphan children of his younger brother under his own roof; and, to say the least, had permitted the world to look upon Lionel as his acknowledged heir. He, however, was not insensible to the precarious tenure of his fortunes, and from boyhood had desired to establish himself in a profession. Sir George proposed a military career, one which almost always presents some points of fascination to a youth of nineteen; and Lionel, whose mind had no very early development, was more than content with the choice. A commission was purchased in one of those regiments whose officers are chiefly supplied from the ranks of the aristocracy; and family pride, together with a true regard for his nephew, induced Sir George to make him a yearly allowance fully suitable to the maintenance of the position in which he had placed him. Meanwhile the two sisters remained under his almost parental protection; and Laura, at eighteen, took the head of her uncle's table.

The doctrine of "Destiny" is charmingly satisfactory when some perfectly unexpected disaster, of which we have been the blind instruments, takes place. The feelings of Laura and Marian Weymouth were entirely a case in point, when, suddenly,

without more preparation than a day or two's vague suspicion, they discovered that their sedate, grey-headed uncle, of fifty-five, was actually in love with, and had proposed to marry, their school companion, their beautiful friend, Emily Dalton! For this result had she been their guest for weeks at a time. Emily belonged to what is called "a good family;" but she was one of the many children of a "younger son." Half-a-dozen sisters and three brothers must ultimately divide with her his slender fortune: but she had been educated in a worldly school, and had always looked on marriage as the stepping-stone to fortune. It had become a by-word in her home, though always uttered *sotto voce*, that love was a luxury reserved for the rich, and romantic reveries an indulgence for the well-endowed. Surely this was precisely the girl to accept with self-gratulation the hand of an elderly baronet of large fortune! Whether by skilful flatteries and evident partiality she had sought it is another question.

The marriage was a hasty one; for there was no reason for delay. Laura and Marian were bridesmaids; but, though not above a hundred miles distant at the time, Lionel was not invited to the wedding. The omission did not arise from any ill or unkind feeling on the bridegroom's part—very far from it. The truth was, the most unpleasant task he had ever imposed on himself was writing to his nephew the intelligence of his intentions; and

Lionel's presence at the wedding-breakfast would have been like that of the skeleton at a feast. Yet after all there was no wrong in his purpose; he had acted for years a father's part to his brother's children; nor did he now intend to desert them: he was only taking upon himself those duties which the "world" had expected from him thirty years before.

Lionel saw the event in its true light; but he had none the less a just perception of the change it effected in his own prospects. In the depths of his heart he had for some time felt that his vocation should not have been a military one, though, out of deference to his uncle's feelings, he had been silent on the subject of his discontent. As his character matured, there sprang up restless energies which revolted at the effeminate existence of a carpet soldier; while at the same time his mind sickened at the associations of active service, and disputed the "honour" of being a legalised slaughterer. But now he determined to sell his commission, and woo fortune in some more congenial path. Soon after the marriage he communicated his wishes to his uncle, who, though a little surprised, raised no opposition; and when Lionel, acknowledging his obligations, yet gave expression to his ardent desire for independence, Sir George easily yielded to his proposal for curtailing to the most necessary trifle his hitherto handsome allowance. In truth, wealthy as the baronet was, he had already discovered many

new channels which were delving themselves for his money, and as ordinary characters ever do, gave up a thousand generous resolves under the pressure of altered circumstances.

It was after Lionel Weymouth had left the army, and during the months which preceded his embarkation for India—that land of golden promise, where he had formed a connection with a mercantile establishment—that he met Geraldine Harmer. The regard which sprung up between them was not of that rapid growth and demonstrative nature which speedily brings about a climax, and not unfrequently dies out as quickly. But silently and gradually it pervaded the heart of each; implanting fresh hopes therein, and giving its own hue to life. And yet not a word of this love had been spoken between them; nay, Lionel considered that his attempt to conceal his affection had been in a great measure successful. He had marked out for himself a career a goal to be reached. Not until his sisters were either married or endowed by him with independence, and not until he had won a fortune to lay at her feet, would he seek Geraldine's love or sue for her hand. During the long years of his absence she should be free: without blame if she forgot him—without remorse if she wedded another. Perhaps in the long run this code of honour works well; for a promise is but a chain that may gall more than it binds; and the strongest of all ties is the unacknowledged one that the heart forges for itself. But,

unfortunately, they whose constancy would shine out most brightly, unimpaired by time or absence, are the very ones who suffer most severely from the alternating hopes and fears which must accompany an unacknowledged love, and which perplex the reason, and make the word "free" but a term of mockery.

Lionel Weymouth left England with a noble appreciation of Geraldine Harmer's worth, and a heart truly and deeply devoted to her. Every purpose and aspiration of his nature led up to one hope—the hope of her affection, and perpetual companionship through the meridian and decline of life—for youth, he foresaw, must be passed in the struggle to win her: but he left with his love unspoken! Perhaps his feelings might have betrayed him from his resolution had not their last interview been broken by one of those commonplace accidents which so often jar on the soul's world of thought and emotion. The gushing words flew back to the heart unuttered; and they parted in the presence of others much as ordinary acquaintances might have done.

There is, generally speaking, so much in a man's nature that is incomprehensible to a woman, that it is always a daring task for her to weigh his actions, or to attempt the divination of his feelings. His love is seldom her love; his faith is not her faith; his life is not her life: only in moments of existence which shine out briefly and brightly in the dark

expanse of memory, like stars on the purple firmament, does it seem that love and sympathy can raise the curtain and let one soul perceive the other. For if woman knows not man, neither can he, except in rarest instances, regulate the spring of her faults, or discover the fountain of her virtues.

Thus, it is not for me to tell how passed the years with Lionel Weymouth. Active was his life, and prosperous in no ordinary degree, if the esteem and respect of his fellow-men could make it so, and the gold which seemed by some strange alchemy to multiply itself at his bidding. He corresponded with Geraldine Harmer on terms of affectionate friendship; but he spoke not of love and marriage. At first, because to the integrity of his purpose it still belonged to hold her "free." But time passed on, and a few strokes of his pen secured ease and independence to his grateful and affectionate sisters. They married too, soon afterwards, in the sphere which was theirs by birth and education. And still he corresponded with Geraldine Harmer, though without any change in the tone of his letters; only that the presents which often accompanied them grew more and more costly. Instead of graceful trinkets—precious more as souvenirs of his regard than for their intrinsic value—came shawls of Cashmere, meet for royalty itself—the costliest tissues from the looms of Decca, and jewels of great value; a monument they were, but we ask, as the poet did at the tomb of a wife, was it of "love or pride?"

The tenderness of deep regard shone forth in every page he wrote; yet still he did not ask her to be his. Why? Ah! that is precisely the question a woman cannot answer.

Time passed very differently with Geraldine Harmer. Hers was a life of great retirement; her father's age and increasing infirmity inducing with each year greater seclusion, while her own inclinations henceforth eschewed not less decidedly the vanities and frivolities of the gay world. With the awakening of the heart comes also the awakening to the hollowness of what the world calls pleasure; and she, like a thousand others, content with the secret worship of a beautiful idea, relinquished every likely opportunity of substituting for it some absolute reality. She was almost happy—cheerful certainly; and four years passed away with the seeming swiftness for ever attendant on a calm and uniform course. It is time in which action, and change, and suffering crowd, that in the retrospect appears so long. Geraldine was seven-and-twenty when her father died. It was a great grief to her; but one of those sorrows which a merciful Providence heals by the touch of time.

A portion of Mr. Harmer's income died with him, but Geraldine found herself mistress of about four hundred-a-year. This was an income quite sufficient to supply her moderate wants, and gratify her simple tastes. She remained in the same pretty cottage they had so long inhabited, and by dint of

frequently, almost constantly, having a female friend for a visitor, contrived the nearest approach to an independent style of living which it is possible for a young single woman to accomplish ; at least, without touching the confines of those conventional proprieties which sometimes bristle very vexatiously in the way of the most pure-intentioned. And still came the letters from India : but less through them than by more indirect channels did she learn that Lionel Weymouth was acquiring a princely fortune, to which her moderate independence would be an unfelt addition.

And still time passed, and Geraldine was thirty—that age at which the fatherless, brotherless, single woman need pause and ask her own nature if it have enough of the oak in itself still, still to stand alone. Probably the woman so placed looks back with rejoicing at having escaped some particular union, or more than one ; and certainly, if she have mind and heart, her ideal of happiness will be far higher and nobler than it was ten years before. If—but it is with Geraldine we have to do ; and she, like so many others, bore the talisman in her heart which shaped out her life as if by the iron hand of Destiny.

CHAPTER II.

"It hurts not him
That he is loved of me."
All's Well that Ends Well.

"I FEAR, Watson, we shall have stormy weather," said Geraldine, addressing an old fisherman whom she had known ever since her first residence on the coast. Watson was an excellent specimen of the British tar—one of the fortunate class who, having escaped the most fearful vicissitudes of active service, disdain the refuge of Greenwich, and rejoicing in the proper complement of limbs and features, ekes out an honest and peaceful and at the same time semi-marine existence, as waterman and fisherman.

"Aye, aye, miss," said Watson, throwing down the cordage he was joining, and touching his hat to the lady; and the next minute he had sprung from his boat which lay idle on the beach, and was sauntering with a sailor's swagger beside her. This was no unusual occurrence, for Watson, as I have said, was an old acquaintance. If he advised a sail, and said the weather was settled, Geraldine and her friends were always willing to trust themselves to his skill and care—these pleasure-trips being usually enlivened by a story from the old "man-of-war's-man." It is true that some of these became thrice-

told tales ; but the exactness with which the " yarns " were repeated, only impressed his hearers with a conviction of Watson's veracity. He was an honest fellow in the main—a little addicted, it might be, to driving hard bargains in the fishing season, when he had got a successful " haul " of fish, and was able to fix the market price ; on which occasions, however, his full heart must vent itself, and he usually made some excuse to call at the cottage and relate his good fortune. Sometimes he met with a rebuke instead of a congratulation, which he listened to with the greatest respect, satisfying his conscience with the reflection that his avocations bordered on a sort of political economy quite beyond a young lady's reasoning. Yet he did not think the world contained so perfect a creature as his patroness ; and imbued as he was with the deepest reverence for her, an absolute affection, almost unconsciously to himself, had taken still deeper root in his heart. All these feelings had expressed themselves in the only compliment he knew how to pay. On the recent repairing and fresh painting of his darling boat, he had called it the " Geraldine," its former laurels having been won under the repellant title of " The Gorgon." Sailors must be exceedingly fond of the hideously picturesque ; and it *was* a sacrifice to carve away the unsightly figure-head into a shapeless mass, which probably more resembled a cornucopia than anything else. As for attempting to substitute a likeness of Geraldine herself, he would have thought it presump-

tion had a ghost from the old carvers arisen to attempt it.

"Are there many boats out?" continued Geraldine, drawing her shawl tightly round her; for the freshening breeze had almost plucked it from her shoulders.

"All our craft will be in before sun-down," replied Watson, "if I know the men. I told them this morning a squall was coming on, and you see there's half-a-dozen owners who took my advice, and their craft are side by side my 'Geraldine.' But I tell you what, miss, there's a brig in the offing that had better hold out to sea. This is nasty weather to come in without a pilot; and they haven't one on board I know by the road she is in now."

Alas! the seaman's fears were but too well founded. As night drew on so increased the hurricane, and by midnight the tempest was raging. The unfortunate brig fired guns of distress; but no boat could have lived through the surf that broke round the coast, like some guard of the furies to forbid a rescue. Geraldine Harmer slept not; but though often and often sympathy with the mariners' perils had kept her wakeful, never before had she paced her own sheltered chamber with so anxious a heart. The brig which had been shown her in the offing, and whose guns of distress she had heard, haunted her with its presence; and the dangers of its crew pressed on her imagination with a force and a mystery alike new to her. It seemed as if her soul

maintained some vague yet spiritual union with them, and she already felt that she knew the disasters which others could only fear.

When the first leaden grey of morning dawned, Geraldine unbarred her window and looked out on the ocean in the distance. The rage of the tempest had abated, but dark driving clouds still obscured the sky, and the sea with a harsh roar still heaved in monstrous billows, and lashed the shore with its yellow foam. She could not distinguish what was doing on the beach ; but crowds of people here and there attested some purpose of humanity or object of curiosity. Geraldine roused a servant, and in a few minutes she and her attendant hurried forth ; but as they approached the beach some of the sailors intercepted them, anxious to save women from the mournful scene to which they had gathered. In few words the tale was told : the brig had gone to pieces on the rocks, and the tide had already washed several dead bodies on shore. Shocked as Geraldine was, and her nerves shaken till she found relief in a flood of tears, the scene even to its minute details appeared but the realisation of a dream, and it did not seem within the power of her will to leave the spot. She did not seek the sad spectacles which presented themselves, but she could not shun them. "Where is Watson?" she asked, not seeing him among the many familiar faces that crowded round her.

"He has gone off, ma'am," replied a bystander,

“with half-a-dozen other boats, in the hopes of still saving some lives from the wreck.”

And another, who had been watching through a glass the spot where a bare mast, sustaining a signal flag, but rocking at the will of the winds, proclaimed the scene of the disaster, exclaimed joyfully—“They are turning back! they are coming in!”

And so it was. Now riding on the crest of a wave, now lost to sight in a watery ravine, the boats sped homeward, battling with dangers and difficulties, but surmounting them all. Presently they could be plainly seen by every anxious watcher, and very soon each separate craft could be distinguished. How the spring of kindly thought and generous deed seemed touched in every heart, as all showed themselves eager to proffer assistance! The first boat that touched the beach contained six or eight sailors, not all Englishmen, who had been rescued from impending death, and from whom it was ascertained that the lost brig was a merchant ship from Mexico and the Havannah; that the captain was among the lost, and that the few passengers who were on board had met the same fate, even in the desperate attempt which had been made to rescue them together in the long-boat—with one exception, however, a child, a girl of ten or eleven years old, who was reported to be saved.

It was the “Geraldine” which brought off this child; Watson had found her in a nearly insensible state, lashed to a piece of the wreck beside the dead

body of a negro woman, said to have been her nurse and only protector during the voyage. The woman had died from some injury on the head—some blow received, no doubt, from the falling spars of the ill-fated vessel; but faithful to the death, her swarthy arm still encircled the scarcely animate form of her charge.

Geraldine Harmer felt drawn irresistibly to the spot where Watson was approaching the shingle. Every one made way for her, and, saving the men who waded through the surf to assist the landing, she was the first to greet the brave old man. At the bottom of the boat, and decently covered with a piece of canvass, which imperfectly revealed the rigid outlines of death, lay the body of the negress; while in the prow, on a couch made of the same rough fabric, the child was extended. Exhausted as she was by suffering, her loveliness was too remarkable to escape notice even at a moment like this. Features that seemed chiselled to the outline of perfect beauty were hers, and a complexion not fair, it is true, but of unsullied clearness, through which the flush of feeling was wont to be the tell-tale of every passing thought. But now the cheek was pallid, and the eyelids drooped, as if to lay their long dark lashes against its whiteness. Her hair almost black, but of a shade richer and brighter, was parted and plaited with care, the ends being tied by what was yesterday perhaps a gay-coloured ribbon, now stained and faded by the sea water. As Watson lifted her in his

arms, the lithe and graceful figure to which the saturated garments clung, and the tiny feet and delicate ankle completed the picture.

Geraldine's kind and generous heart yearned towards the desolate girl; and though many of the bystanders offered succour and protection, they drew back almost as if relinquishing a claim when she said—"Carry her home to the cottage to me. I will take charge of her till she is claimed by her friends."

And now a new life opened to Geraldine Harmer. She did not know before how sweet a thing it was to have one human being dependent on her for love and help; and before a week had passed she dreaded the time which should bring tidings of the child's parentage, or the assertion of claims greater than her own. Florentia was her name, and, as the child persisted and believed, the only one she had; and Spanish was the only language that she spoke. Not, however, the pure Castilian which a student might have comprehended, or to which Geraldine's knowledge of Italian would have helped her, but a strange jargon which no one could be found thoroughly to understand. And it was remarkable that, as she acquired English, which she did with wonderful facility, the child seemed to lose the recollection of her native tongue! Perhaps she was even younger than she seemed, for tropical growth defies European calculation; and fondly as in many respects there was evidence she had been tended, her mind was

utterly uncultivated. She could not read, and books even seemed a novelty to her; though she would turn them about and look for embellishments of art in their pages, showing, too, in her choice a quick eye and right taste in appreciating a graceful outline or beautiful landscape. From the child's own account, so far as she could make herself understood, her home had been in a sultry climate, where she had lived with a dark lady whom she called her mother, surrounded with pomp, and state, and luxuries. That a short time before she left this home her mother received a letter—a letter brought, she knew, from a ship; that it contained bad news, she was sure; that her mother broke into a passion of rage and grief on reading it; that she threw herself on the floor, and tore her hair in her agony; that then she fell ill, but before she died she had bound Netta, the negress, by some fearful oath to do her bidding; and that she had given her a jewel-hilted dagger for some purpose of vengeance, which dagger, by the way, had been found on the body when preparing it for interment. Of her father Florentia knew nothing, except that her mother wore a miniature of him till the bad letter came; and that then she had broken it into fragments and trampled it under her feet.

What a story!—one in which just enough of fact was told to awaken the curiosity it could not satisfy. It seemed to point at love and guilt—the betrayer and the betrayed; that love, if love it should be called, which, lighted by the flame of jealousy, may

change to hate, vengeance, purposed crime—every stormy passion of the soul—everything which rends and shatters it, except remorse. There could be little doubt that Florentia was a quadroon—one of that class where the point of mixed descent is generally as remarkable for its beauty as for the unhappy circumstances of social position which descend as a legacy to a spurious race.

Of religion the child had none—her only idea connected with it being that of propitiating the Virgin, whose image, in the form of a chased gold ornament, she had constantly worn.

Probably had the captain of the brig been saved, he might have been able to give some account of his passengers; as it was, conjecture spent itself in vain surmises. The advertisements inserted in England and sent out to Mexico remained unanswered, and all which could be ascertained—and that was a sort of negative information—was, that no such passengers as the negress and the child had been registered to the owners of the ship. Most probably some golden persuasions had overruled that customary formality.

Many a heart has a wider capacity for loving than itself is at all aware of; but what a pity that affection—the only sweetener of existence—should waste and wither for want of objects on which to rest! Most truly has one of our deepest thinkers—aye, and sternest moralists too, for he lashes his fellow-men for their follies and weaknesses almost as severely as for their vices, and eschews all “rose-

water" measures as inefficacious—most truly even he says that the wealth of a man consists in the number of things that he loves and blesses and is loved and blessed by; and to believe this is surely the most beautiful faith in the world, even as to go on increasing such riches, bestowing, and blessing as we receive and are blessed, is the holiest and happiest life we can lead. Wherever the seed of affection is sown, some weed of selfishness is uprooted to make way for it.

Months passed away; and now Florentia spoke English fluently. If a slightly foreign accent still hovered on her tongue, or some strange but yet expressive word found its place in a sentence, such peculiarity but gave another charm to a voice that was the most musical in the world. As graceful as she was beautiful, her very presence was a perpetual poetry in the house. Who could look at this womanish child and childish woman and not find excuse for her faults, if by dint of narrow searching you could discover them? Certainly not Geraldine Harmer; for the luscious intoxicating incense of affection rose up round her, and obscured her judgment! It is a trite remark that we love better those we serve than them who benefit us; but there was an exception to the rule here, for the child attached herself to her protectress, and returned her affection with all the quickness and passion of her southern nature. Oh, that *personal* love! how very, very sweet it is! The love of a child or of a dog, who attaches itself not

because we are rich, or clever, or handsome, or even good, but for some individuality about us—that something which we call—oneself. If the child might hang about Geraldine's neck, fall asleep with her head on her knee, cling to her hand, or, failing this, hold by a morsel of her dress, she was happy ; and she shewed that she was happy by her sunny looks and the satisfied smile that played round her lips. She had the courage, too, of a little lioness, when occasion called it forth. Witness the following incident :—

Geraldine had determined to be herself the instructress of her youthful *protégée*; and fully aware that a mind possessing almost the quickness of maturity, and yet presenting the very blank of early childhood, could be subjected to no common discipline, imposed but few set rules or book lessons on her pupil. But how she talked ! how *they* talked, for the child talked and gave free expression to her thoughts ; and Geraldine listened with no little interest to the strange fresh ideas which found utterance. One day they were taking a country walk together, walking and talking — now of the bee or the butterfly as it floated near or dived into the cup of a wild flower ; now of the sparkling stream they had just crossed, how it came from the hills and was journeying to the sea ; and now of the blue sky overhead, and the stars that came out when the sun went down. Suddenly they heard a howling on the other side of the hedge ; and a cat, made

furious by the driving of some mischievous boys, sprang through, and darting at Geraldine caused her to scream with momentary and involuntary terror. In an instant the child threw herself on the animal; and though its talons literally ploughed into her hands and her cheek, and though she fell to the ground in the struggle, she relinquished not her hold on its throat. The rage which flashed like an electric light from her eyes, and flushed in her cheek, so altered her countenance for the moment, that she would hardly have been recognised by those who knew her best; but it gave way to a quiver of scorn round her lips as she knew that the creature was strangling in the grasp of her little hands, which neither Geraldine's attempts nor entreaties could relax. They were alone — for the urchins, the original cause of their terror, had made off in another direction; and not till the unfortunate cat had ceased to struggle and was dead in her hands, did the child fling it from her and kick it for carrion out of her path.

There was something in this scene which terrified Geraldine, if in a different manner yet in a much greater degree than the furious cat had done. It was the first gleam she had had of the stormy passions that slumbered in that young heart; and she felt what giants to work good or evil were crouching there. Florentia herself could not understand that she had done the least wrong in giving way to her anger; and how could Geraldine chide very

severely, when that anger had been aroused in her defence ?

“What shall I call you ?” had been one of the child’s earliest questions to her protectress, and Geraldine pausing a minute had said, “Call me sister.” So sister, sister, was the sweet word that rang daily, hourly, in her ears, with a harmony of which she never wearied, suggesting as it ever did some thought of affection. Geraldine asked not herself how it was that she cared so much less than before for her acquaintances ; and yet it was so : the companionship of the loving and fresh-hearted child seemed all in all to her. This love was her one reality in life. Let us pause to ask if it clashed with that which was her soul’s sustaining idea !

Not for one instant. Distinct as double stars, they lent each other a light—blended their rays it might be, but never disturbed the harmony of her being. She wrote to Lionel Weymouth a full account of the shipwreck ; mentioned the adoption of the little unknown child ; described her extraordinary beauty ; sketched her strange impulsive character ; gave even the anecdote of the slaughtered cat,—which latter incident won from him a hearty approval, and caused him always to mention her as the little heroine. He applauded Geraldine’s adoption of her, and rejoiced that she had so interesting a companion ; and now, when presents came “from India,” the *protégée* was sure to be remembered. But the gift, however gorgeous or costly,

was always a childish toy. Lionel had been told she was a little girl of nine or ten or eleven years old, and forgot the change that four or five years must work in these early spring-days of life. How swiftly they passed by, seeming like a dream to look back on!—yet they opened to perfect loveliness the budding promise of the child, while they stealthily robbed Geraldine of her early bloom. Still she looked younger than she really was; as they always do, when compared with commoner clay, who have souls to light up the countenance, and make known the one imperishable beauty of expression.



CHAPTER III.

“Be tended by
My blessing! should my shadow cross thy thoughts
Too sadly for their peace, so put it back
For calmer hours in memory’s darkest hold.
If unforgotten! should it cross thy dreams,
So might it come like one that looks content,
With quiet eyes unfaithful to the truth.”

TENNYSON.

WAS it summer or autumn? Even the calendar would scarcely have helped you to decide? It was the time when English scenery wears a gorgeous and yet sober hue; when, in the still atmosphere, the dark-robed trees stand motionless, as if too proud to sway in the breeze, as they might when decked in palest green, or laughing behind a mask

of blossoms ; and when the garden-flowers are no longer those richly-scented children of the soil that came like heralds—the heralds of the present statelier race.

As we have hinted, Time had done much in his own quiet way during the last few years ; and among other things a certain avenue of beeches, mere saplings when Geraldine first came to her cottage, had grown to be the admiration of every visitor. Their boughs just met overhead, in some cases kissing and parting at the bidding of the faintest breeze, at others interlacing their fibres and refusing a divorce. Beneath these trees ran a hard and polished gravel path, though at their very roots was spread that soft and mossy dark green turf which tells of care and cultivation.

It was the evening of a warm bright day ; the sun had already sunk far below the horizon, and the golden harvest-moon decked the garden landscape in that olden beauty of which we never weary, and to which, familiar as it is, we still find paid the meed and word of admiration. Along the gravel path, beneath the sheltering trees, a young girl danced, enticing after her a favourite greyhound, whose airy movements seemed typical of her own—danced from the mere exuberance of happiness and mirth—danced to the only music of her own rich singing. Tuneful as that of a bird it was, and almost as wild ; for though Florentia's delicate ear saved her from the possibility of a discord, she was wilful in her ways, and finding she could play—to please herself—on

any instrument which came before her, and sing after the same fashion to the same easily contented auditor, she positively resisted all study when she reached the point that would chain her to application. Yet her snatches of song, and perfect modulation, made up a charming music nevertheless.

And so she danced—her full white dress floating in the soft breeze, now showing, now hiding her lithe and graceful figure. A scarlet cashmere scarf, with richly embroidered ends, had fallen from one shoulder, but passing by her waist, was gathered lightly in her hand. The scarf was Geraldine's, but it was one of Florentia's wilful ways to appropriate for the moment anything of her "sister's" to which she took a fancy.

Geraldine Harmer might also have been seen in the beech-tree avenue, but walking slowly, and some lookers-on might have thought most calmly; for the shadows were too heavy to show the fitful gleam of her eye or the quiver of her lip, whenever the sound of wheels broke on her ear, or the listening sense was strained to fantasy, and mocked her with its cheat. In her hand she grasped a letter, she knew not why, for every syllable of its brief contents seemed repeated before her wherever she gazed;—on the sombre trees, or the calm cold sky. At last, at last Lionel Weymouth had returned—even now was speeding to greet her, and had announced his coming in words more full of tender meaning than any he had ever addressed to her before. She felt

that his heart had been through the long years of absence as true as her own; and her frame trembled and reeled under the excess of her happiness.

It was before the days of universal railroads; and trusting to the uncertainties and delays of posting, there is no wonder that Lionel Weymouth was an hour or two later than he had expected to be. But why should his coming at all bring such joy to Florentia? Simply because she understood, though vaguely, that Geraldine's dearest friend, of whose goodness and cleverness she had so often talked—Geraldine would scarcely have believed how often—was coming at last; and being herself always quite happy—happy to the very filling of her heart, this new delight brimmed over the cup to that free burst of joyancy.

Hark! now surely that is the sound of wheels! Yes, yes—nearer: there is the clatter of the horses' hoofs upon the piece of shingly road. A carriage turns the corner, and now the postilions, directed by some villager, sweep up to the gate. The servants are ready, but a gentleman has sprung out before the steps could be lowered. Florentia no longer sings, and for a minute is motionless. And Geraldine Harmer—she who at this moment for the first time fully realises the depth and truth and intensity of a love which has been for ten years a portion of her being—is she also awed to silent stillness? Almost—and yet she glides as if impelled by some magnetic force into the deepest shadow of

the trees; her dress of darkest velvet does not betray her, and she leans against a friendly trunk to save herself from falling. The hour is come, and yet her heart cries out, "Not yet—not yet; it is too much!"

But the stranger sees by the full moonlight the graceful figure, standing like a white-robed statue in the beech-tree avenue; recognises, too, the scarf—his gift—and bounding thither, clasps Florentia in his arms before she is aware, kisses her cheek with a trembling lip, and murmurs the one word "Geraldine!" before a laughing voice has time to say, "*I am not Geraldine!*"

He starts—discovers his mistake at a glance—makes a confused apology, and seeing Geraldine at last, wreathes his arm round her; but he is annoyed at his own blundering precipitation, and neither kiss nor embrace is so warm as those which were in truth the free outbreak of his feelings!

"Is she not beautiful?" exclaimed Geraldine, an hour or two afterwards when, a late dinner or early supper being concluded, Florentia had left the room for a few minutes. "Is she not as beautiful as I told you she was?"

"Beautiful!" replied Lionel Weymouth, "she is the loveliest creature I ever beheld!"

Yet while he spoke he held Geraldine's hand in his, and had already found fit opportunity of

breathing in her ear the hopes and aspirations of his life. It was late that night ere he left for the hotel where he had engaged accommodation.

And now, Geraldine Harmer, indulge for the brief interval you may the ecstasy of pure, unclouded happiness—the dream of perfect love. Thou bearest the signet of thine own devotion in the humility which wonders how *thou* canst be so well beloved, commingled with that unshaken faith which cannot doubt *his* word. Dream on, poor woman heart, of earth's choice happiness, and life's sole reality—dream on: the hours are brief, and years must fling their shadows ere that dream, but in serenest shape, shall descend to thee from heaven again!

Three weeks have passed: the scene is in London now. Geraldine Harmer has accepted the invitation of an old friend, and with Florentia has journeyed thither. Some indefinable yet right feeling pointed out this step. Lionel Weymouth desires her daily society: yet they are not to the world's eye betrothed. He does not urge the declaration of their engagement, and she instinctively shrinks from it. Kind, affectionate he is, and yet—and yet she is restless and unsatisfied! But they are very gay—as gay, at least, as London's dullest season will permit; and theatres are visited, and a few parties are gathered together to do honour to Lionel Weymouth.

It might be called Florentia's first introduction into society; but she had none of that girlish

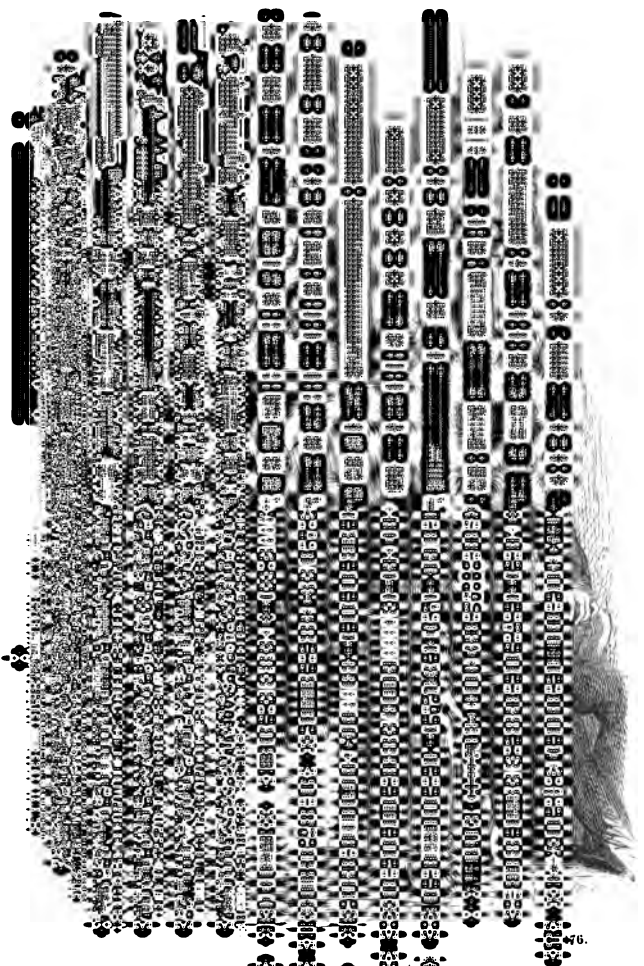
bashful awkwardness, which much oftener arises from anxious vanity and excessive self-consciousness than from the opposite cause. She was far too natural and impulsive a being for anything of the sort: she had sprung, it is true, as if at one bound, from the child to the woman; but the simple, yet warm sincerity and *naïve* vivacity of her manners had a charm about them as captivating as it was indescribable. And her beauty—of that there could not be two opinions. Strangers raved of it; and on seeing her again only grew more and more extravagant in their expressions of admiration. Lovers were already entering the lists, and “looking daggers” at one another; but awed by some mysterious halo that seemed to encircle their idol, they had not dared to avow their homage.

As if to make amends for his one familiarity, however unintended, Lionel Weymouth treated Florentia with a marked respect, that bordered on deference, and had something singular in its character, when the difference of age between them was remembered. At first it could not have been quite easy for him to maintain, since she treated him as an old and familiar friend; but by quick degrees her manner changed, and while to three-fourths of her acquaintance she was still the childish girl, to him she was ever the dignified woman. His respect was even of a distant kind; for he always left to others to surround her with those *petits soins* and nameless attentions so many were eager and ready to pay.

Yet once, when a fop whom she laughed at and despised was forcing some knightly service upon her somewhat against her will—folding and arranging a shawl for her shoulders, I think—Lionel Weymouth was quick to the rescue. But why did his cheek flush, and his hands tremble? and why, when she thanked him with a look, and passed her arm uninvited through his, did the flush change to paleness, and the common-place words he strove to utter die upon his tongue?

Geraldine saw the look, the flush, the sudden pallor: but she only drew her opera-hood a little more over her face, and took the arm of the discarded stripling.

It was the next day: Geraldine Harmer, who had not hitherto in her whole life consented to a subterfuge, for once planned and manœuvred. She contrived that Florentia and her hostess should be away for some hours, and this during the time that Lionel Weymouth was sure to call. He was shown into the drawing-room, and awaited her coming, but only for a few minutes. She entered, and a friendly greeting ensued: but as Geraldine passed the nearest window she drew down the blind. It was a cloudy day and yet the light seemed garish—as it always does to the mentally oppressed—blinding to her eyes and torturing to her brain. Lionel Weymouth was seated in an easy-chair, and presently Geraldine found herself leaning over the back of it. She felt that she must speak without being seen; she



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knew that she could not control her countenance.

"Lionel," she exclaimed, in a low yet calm voice, "you are not happy!"

"Not happy! oh yes; why not?"

"Be frank," she returned: "do not deceive yourself or me. I repeat, you are not—we are not—happy!"

"Geraldine!" It was the only word to which it seemed he could give utterance: there was a forced intention to take her hand; but a stronger and truer impulse restrained him.

"And yet," she continued, "the first wish of my heart—the purpose of my life—is to make you happy."

"Best Geraldine!" But now he stooped his head, and buried his face in his hands.

"Even"—and she touched his arm as she spoke—"even if your happiness must take a different shape from that foolish dream of early life. Moreover I blame you not—I see your sufferings, and from my soul I pity them."

"Oh, that you would despise and rebuke me instead—your scorn, so well deserved, would be more endurable than such compassion."

"You are ungenerous now. Would you rob me of my own self-respect? While I honour and esteem you I shall not be ashamed of"—and her voice perceptibly trembled—"of the love I have borne you."

"And I! Oh, Geraldine, if you but knew how,

for long years, I have worshipped your image—how every aim of existence has circled round to one dear hope—how, even now, how very dear you are to me——”

“And yet,” interrupted Geraldine, “you love Florentia !”

There was a pause ; one of those pauses in which the tongue is chained because emotions crowd and crush together, paralysing every power, except the keen experience of the heart’s unutterable agony. What *he* felt was but vaguely shadowed forth ; less clearly told by word or gesture than by the rigid lines of suffering to which his visage moulded. With Geraldine the last ray of hope, which quite unconsciously to herself had lingered in her heart, and redeemed it from utter darkness, expired, and—groping for a moment in the gloom—her reason took time to recover its balance. But bravely it wrestled, and beautifully her soul triumphed.

“Youth has departed,” continued Geraldine, at length, “and I should have known that the few graces——”

“No—no,” interrupted Lionel, seizing her hand, and pressing it between his own ; “I will not listen to such words. Take me, for I am yours ; take me and save me from myself ! Take me, directly—to-morrow ; forgive me this wandering of the will, and I will learn to look upon it as a madness ! Take me, Geraldine !”

“To scorn myself—and blight the happiness of

the two beings I love best in the world? Never! You do not know me, Lionel Weymouth."

"Oh, do not draw your hand away, and speak so sternly. Even now, in my humiliation and deep misery, it is *your* sympathy I want. And yet, Geraldine, it is well for you to be cold."

"Cold!" It was the only word she could utter, and as it came forth it seemed to freeze her lips and keep them parted. Cold! when at that moment she would have flung herself at his feet to be trampled in the mire, if *that* could have given him peace; cold! when the large silent tears of agony were falling from her eyes, unregarded by him, though they splashed like rain-drops on his shoulder; cold! when, for one word or look of genuine love from the idol of her worship she would have thought life itself but a fit sacrifice! Yet gentle, though heroic, as was her nature—the word had stung her, and spurred from its lair that fiery steed, a woman's pride.

"Take me," repeated Lionel, "and forgive this madness."

"It was the past which was madness," said Geraldine, firmly; and her tears seemed now absorbed by the long lashes—at least they fell no longer. "You will marry Florentia!"

"Yes," she continued, after a brief silence—for he was speechless, and had buried his face in his handkerchief—"and by-and-by we shall smile at the

old maid's 'love passage,' and wonder how she could have been so foolish."

"Florentia may avenge your wrongs, Geraldine, and refuse to love me."

There was something in these words which again unnerved her. Refuse to love him—that seemed impossible! But she spoke calmly, and said, "I have no wrongs to be avenged; dismiss such a thought from your mind. And—and—Florentia admires you, that I know. And think you that securing her happiness will not bring peace to me? Ah! you cannot tell how dear she is to me—dear as any sister could have been, dear almost as I could fancy a child might be."

She spoke the truth; and yet her words, as truth may often do, conveyed a false impression. Lionel Weymouth believed at that moment that Florentia was dearer to her than he ever had been; and that several wishes and feelings worked together to prompt her present conduct. Her resolution might in some measure have been strengthened by her love for the object of his passion, yet not in the manner or to the degree that he imagined. Geraldine Harmer was one who acted from her own right impulses, yoked with, rather than chained by, high principles; yet she did not analyse her motives narrowly enough to find how noble they were. And her generous nature unconsciously masked its generosity—partly from that inwoven pride without which

no character has dignity, and partly from the sensitive delicacy which shrinks from making another feel the object of a sacrifice or the recipient of a favour.

Ah, how seldom the best and wisest of us can judge truly of another! Faults and weaknesses rise like straws to the surface; and great virtues, thrown up by the storms of life—like pearls from the deep—become apparent; but the intermediate world, which is that of habitual emotion and daily existence, which makes the realities of life, and which moulds the individuality of character, is seldom fathomed. No wonder Lionel Weymouth failed to see the ruin he had worked; the beautiful palace which Hope had built and Faith made strong, laid prostrate in the dust; and Desolation growing to a giant, and brooding over the fragments!

It was a rapid wooing, that of Florentia Lawson—(Geraldine had bestowed on her *protégée* her own mother's name). A few weeks and the wedding-day was named, and no one paused, or had paused to consider if it were a gulf or a haven before the pair. So great the difference of years between them, that in her happy days Geraldine had shrunk from making Florentia her confidante, and the artless girl had never suspected that the most dear friend of whom she had heard so much could be looked on in any other light. Yes, it was Geraldine's praise of him she loved that had prepared her to admire him; and when Lionel came, she saw a man in the prime and pride of life, with a mind well stored and

enriched by travel and observation ; though perhaps she did not herself know how much the impression he made on her was deepened by his being the first of his sex who treated her otherwise than as a child.

Geraldine was the first to hint to Florentia that Lionel loved her. Partly because her own soul once nerved to meet the destiny which was before her, she felt there must be no pause or hesitation in its course ; and partly because, generous to the last, she was willing to prepare *his* way before him. Startled as the young girl was at first, surprise soon gave way to an intoxication of delight ; it was all true, and in a few, very few days they were betrothed. Now came a new trial for Geraldine : with the innocent frankness of a child, Florentia would sit at her feet, and throwing back the rich clustering curls from her face as she looked up, would talk of her happiness, and pour out her praises of *him*. The admiration she had first experienced still held its place in her heart ; and side by side with it now stood pride—pride at being the object of his choice. Nor was she insensible to the influence and charm of his wealth ; though if visions of future magnificence floated before her, it is only just to own there was not one in which her dear “sister” had not place—was not to be endowed with some costly gift, or pleased with some expensive enjoyment. But if she was proud of being chosen, was not he proud of being accepted ? Yes. She was so young—so

beautiful ; and when her lip answered to his kiss, he felt assured he was beloved !

Pride—admiration—passion—the common elements wherewith poor self-deluders think to build up wedded happiness ! As much material as can be expected when there is a score of years' disparity between the parties ; unless, indeed, the mating be at that later period of life when character on both sides is formed and developed, and the difference of a score of years or a score of weeks would be equally unimportant. But love there was not—there could not be ; love which is sympathy, and of which the fond caress or endearing word is but an outward and earthly type. If we speak to be understood—yea, if we only think, for another's thoughts to flow in unison with ours, not wearying with tame monotony, but even as bright rivers mingle ere they reach the ocean, bringing each to each its separate wealth and separate hue—enriching, strengthening, beautifying ! this there was not.

What Geraldine Harmer endured is written only in that book, where surely beyond the skies a record is kept of woman's trials and sacrifices. Hours of despair, in which madness with all its terrors hovered near, and death, which seemed more distant, looked like a benignant angel, yet one forbidden to aid her. She made no confidante—she was too proud to do so ; and indulged not in demonstrations. Still it was impossible such struggles could endure without making sign of their work ; but the cluster of

acquaintances we call "the world"—who never, I believe, by any chance guess rightly the riddles of life—attributed her looking ill to the fatigue and excitement she was undergoing in preparing for the wedding. Everybody congratulated her on the "brilliant match" her *protégée* was making, much as they would a dowager on the like bestowal of a portionless daughter. And without any positive intentions of malice or scandal, they added half-a-dozen years at least to Geraldine's age;—as well they might, for the lingering traces of youth had departed suddenly and for ever, and her long, fine hair, which only a few weeks since was dark, and rich, and abundant, now showed lines of white that seemed to thicken day by day. Her beautiful hair! of which she had been conscious and proud—even a little vain—this too must be laid upon the altar of her vanished, wasted youth! Strange that those whitening tresses had a spell which flung a shadow in his path, and saddened Lionel Weymouth's spirit even on his wedding-day!

CHAPTER IV.

"If I be sure I am not dreaming now,
I should not doubt to say it was a dream."
SHELLEY.

YEARS have passed away—seven years at least. It is a bright spring day, when spring has caught

a flower or two from summer that is so close at hand. Birds trill their glad notes from the neighbouring boughs, now in gay chorus, now taking up the single strain as if in loving rivalry. The buzz of busy insects fills the air, and every sound and sight of nature is typical of joy and youth, showing once more the old and yet the new-born graces of the Hebe-Mother—Earth.

Soon after his marriage Lionel Weymouth had purchased a beautiful residence, with highly-cultivated pleasure-grounds, within an easy drive of the metropolis. And here we still find him. But those seven years have brought their chances and changes, and life wears to him now a very different aspect. He is seated near an open window, and near him is a lady, a much-loved visitor, arrived within these few hours, after an absence of many months on the Continent. The reader should recognise her at once, for Geraldine Harmer is very little altered; or, if altered at all, one might say improved in appearance. She did not look any older than on the "wedding day" we parted from her; and though suffering now from painful anxiety, her countenance had lost the habitual shade of sadness it then wore. It would seem that at one bound she had sprung from almost youth to that most uncertain of all ages called "certain;" but that since then Time had passed her by without claiming his tribute. He had even stayed the bleaching of the hair, which showed in massive glossy coils beneath the prettiest of morning caps

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(a Parisian purchase) which Geraldine wore; the few lines of silver among the braids which shaded her cheek being by no means unbecoming—they never are when forty years are fairly passed. Nature adapts her pictures better than the inventors of patent wigs and mysterious hair dyes, and the whitening locks harmonise with the fading cheek, with which youthful tresses only—contrast. Then Geraldine had the good taste to eschew girlish costume, and dress like what she was—the woman of forty-one or two. Having mentioned the pretty cap, therefore, I may add that her dress was of a rich dark silk—made, however, very fashionably, and which set off her figure, unimpaired in its roundness and symmetry, to the greatest advantage.

I really fear that in my earlier chapters I neglected to describe Geraldine's person; and now it is so late in the day, I must needs be brief. Of the middle height, with fine eyes, a pretty mouth, and good teeth, many people thought her still a very "charming woman;" and every one who had made her acquaintance lately believed that she must have been very handsome a few years ago. Perhaps this was not altogether true: her beauty consisted very much in the beauty of expression; and as this depends on character, and as every development of character with her had been a beautiful one, it is very possible that she was better-looking for a woman of forty than she had been as the girl of twenty. She might have married within the last seven years, as the

saying is, "over and over again;" and there is no numbering how many opportunities she had had of choosing during her tour on the Continent (made with friends who were known at every court in Europe) among German barons and Italian counts; but not even a French peer, who was neither old nor disagreeable, could make her appreciate the privilege of embroidering a coronet on her handkerchief.

Clinging lovingly by her side was her god-child and namesake, Lionel's eldest daughter, a beautiful girl of six years old. She took not after her mother, for she was grave and thoughtful beyond her years, and loved better to hold by Geraldine's hand and listen to her words than play with her gayer and younger sister, the little Florentia, who was just now alternately chasing a butterfly and trampling down the flower-beds, or gambolling with Misa the greyhound, once before mentioned in this history, who was grown by this time an old dog. But Lionel Weymouth had much to say to Geraldine, unfit for the quick ears of a child six years old to receive; and urging that her sister wanted her companionship, and only half enjoyed her sports without her, he enticed the docile child from the verandah to the garden.

For a period that might be counted by years, Geraldine had been content and serene in the presence of Lionel Weymouth. It is true that he was still the dearest object on earth to her heart; but her affection was so moulded with love for

Florentia, and entire devotion to their children, that there was not one selfish feeling intermingled, or a thought she had need to hide from her own scrutiny, when remembering him as the husband of another. As much could not be said for Lionel Weymouth; for though worlds would not have tempted him to breathe a thought that could have disturbed the serenity he knew she had regained, there were regrets and convictions buried in the inmost recesses of his own heart, which, strive as he might to stifle and extinguish them, still burned on with constant power to torture. Laid out as in a map, he now could see how blessed a lot his life would have been with her whose true and long-tried love he had despised and rejected! What had it been for seven long years? A dream of unsatisfied longings, whose only waking reality had been disappointment!

"How kind of you," he exclaimed, as soon as the child had left them—"how kind of you to come thus promptly at my summons! Yet it is only like yourself; for I never yet knew you pause at a sacrifice of your own convenience."

"My dear friend," replied Geraldine, "you give me praise where I do not deserve it. My coming has been perfectly convenient; and now only let me stay as long as I can be useful."

"Then you must stay for ever," said Weymouth mournfully; for you only have power to sway Florentia's anger. Even to you, Geraldine, it is

a self-laceration for me to confess the agonies of the last six months. That I have been wronged or dishonoured I do not believe; she is alike too pure and too proud for that. But the step I have taken in prohibiting this Italian the house, and intercepting their correspondence—I have never broken a seal, but burnt the letters unread—became imperative to save myself from insult, and her reputation from injury. Nay, Geraldine, do not weep; for your tears wring my heart more than my own sorrows.”

“This dreadful story,” murmured Geraldine, “seems more than I can realise. In the same house, yet refuse to see you!—you the most indulgent husband I ever knew. Violent and indignant at this first assumption of authority, and declaring she has ceased to love you!”

“For a long time I have known that mournful truth,” he replied; and, as he continued, his countenance assumed the same rigid mould of suffering which occasioned once before, but by a far different scene, was never to be forgotten by Geraldine—“for a long time I have known that wretched truth. And with love extinguished, sympathy dwarfed and dying, and my imagination shamed from the falsity which painted everything between us in its own bright colours, I have no hope but for our children’s sakes to maintain the respectabilities of life, and let appearance cheat the world and stalk like a ghost above the grave of my happiness.”

“Happiness!” the word was echoed, but not by

Geraldine Harmer. At the moment Lionel had uttered it Florentia glided into the room : she was attired in a loose white muslin wrapper, her long dark hair partially gathered up with a comb, but two or three heavy curls still falling on her shoulders ; her cheeks were colourless, and her eyes heavy, as eyes become from want of sleep, or from the "weight of unshed tears." Geraldine's first impulse was to rise and embrace her ; but Florentia waved her away, and resting her hand on the opposite side of the table which separated her from her husband also, she exclaimed, "Do not touch me, my sister, my friend. It was because I dreaded your affection that I refused to see you an hour ago. I feel that I shall lose my senses if I am melted to softness or tears, and there are many things I wish to speak of calmly and clearly."

Geraldine attempted some soothing reply, but the words died on her lips, and both she and Weymouth felt awed to silence and attention.

"I can read in your countenance," she continued, addressing Geraldine, "that *he* has made his deadly accusation ; and only to you of all human beings, and only in his presence would I deign to contradict this foulest charge. Hear me, just Heaven ! By my children's sacred selves I swear it !" And raising the hand already clenched above her head, she poured forth asseverations of her innocence that were awful from the fervour and intensity of her expressions.

"He does not doubt you, he does not doubt you," repeated Geraldine more than once, ere the wretched wife comprehended her words: "had you entered the room but a few minutes earlier you would have heard his confident assertion."

Mechanically, as it were, Florentia's eyes wandered from Geraldine's countenance to that of her husband, who, visibly affected, returned her gaze, it might be with more tenderness than she had seen in his looks for many a day. She took the hand he held towards her and pressed it for a moment. "If I have not to defend myself," she said, but sinking now into a low chair that was beside her, "it is fit I should make a confession of such things as are true. Ah, Geraldine Harmer, you little thought when I was saved from the ocean which ought to have been my grave that I should live to hate my life, and most of all, to hate the destiny by which you fostered and cherished me. And Lionel Weymouth, my husband, you little guessed when early in our married days you showed me the letters, which, still preserved with care, had travelled to another hemisphere and back again, the letters from Geraldine which told my story, that their perusal was the sowing of deadly seeds in my heart. Little more than a child, I was ignorant then of the heart's wants and its mysteries; but I lived quickly, and quickly learned a dreadful history. Yes, without knowing one detail I know it—have long known it, as truly as if I were conscious of them all. You loved one another!"

"Hush!" said Lionel, authoritatively; while Geraldine buried her face in her handkerchief, and could only by a gesture implore her to be silent.

"I must speak," continued Florentia, but rising and bending over Geraldine, whom she caressed like a child. "Sister, I do not think you ever knew how much I loved you. Nobody could love you as much as I, because no one could know you so well; and when I left you for him—yes, even then there was an aching void in my heart, that nothing but your presence could fill. A bad sign this, was it not? and such a one does not appear when pairs are mated by years, and sympathy, and tastes, and a certain heart affection that is not altogether what the world very falsely calls 'love.' Well, the deadly knowledge came—the knowledge that lifted up a curtain and explained everything which had seemed a mystery. The secluded youth, the single life, the perfect faith, and the bitter requital. And I—I—the creature of your goodness—I, who so loved you, to have been the cause of your misery!—I, who would have died for you a thousand cruel deaths; Geraldine, if I am mad do you have mercy on me." And Florentia, falling on her knees, flung her arms about the other as if she were indeed a maniac. Presently tears came to her relief accompanied by deep-drawn sobs.

It was a dreadful scene for all; but one that was not now to be ended suddenly or abruptly. Like swimmers plunged in deep water, they could

not touch the shore of safer discourse in a moment.

"How bitter was my knowledge," pursued Florentia, when she had become a little calmer, "words cannot tell: the more bitter because I soon perceived that, grown used to my fatal beauty—it was that, you both know it was that which drew him to me—he discovered that my thoughts were not his thoughts, my pleasures and pursuits not his. It is pleasant to be pupil and teacher sometimes; but not always, as we were. He wanted a friend more often, and I was only a plaything. It might be different now, for my heart has grown old and wise lately; but love once burnt out is never to be rekindled; however, I too had discoveries to make. It is not good to analyse one's affections very closely—happy people never do it—but I could not help such weakness, and I found that I, too, was unsatisfied. I found that I wanted the companionship of a young heart that had everything to *hope for* in life, instead of present existence to enjoy. I wearied of every luxury directly its novelty was gone; I wanted some one to laugh with my foolish thoughts and foolish deeds; not *at*, or worse—rebuke them; I wanted some one *with* whom, not *from* whom, hand in hand I could win my experience. I wanted a young heart to answer mine, even as he wanted one as wise and as gentle as yours.

"One thing more," she continued; "and it shall be said, if I die in the telling. In him whose name

has been slanderously coupled with mine—the young poet, the exiled patriot—whose heart was one strong spring of hope and aspiration—whose love was the love of life or death, not like your English love!”—and her lip curled scornfully as she uttered the word—“not like your English love, whose pulses are regulated by the jingling of your gold; in *him* I recognised the soul’s companion God had portioned for me. And yet we parted without a sign that could wrong my husband; parted with the cold measured adieu of friendship; parted without the utterance of one word that could open the tomb of either heart! Now tell me for what I have to live?”

While she had been speaking Florentia had taken from the table the jewel-hilted dagger, which years before had been intended for some dark though unexplained purpose; but which, from its costliness, had been considered latterly a mere toy and ornament. She took it from its sheath, and felt with her hand the temper of the blade, which, blunted no doubt by time, and rusted from neglect, looked a less murderous weapon than it might formerly have done. Still there was something in the action which terrified Geraldine to a degree of which she felt almost ashamed, and coupled with the words, “tell me for what I have to live?” thrilled through her whole frame.

“Your children, Florentia!” she exclaimed with much feeling, and attempting at the same moment to take the dagger from her hand.

But Florentia started to her feet; there was a wild flash in her eyes which even Lionel noticed, and which communicated Geraldine's terrors to him. She clutched the dagger yet more tightly as she cried, "My children! they will be better cared for by their step-mother than they could be by me; they will be better loved by their father than now, when the only impediment to his happiness is removed."

"Florentia, you are mad to talk thus wildly," exclaimed Weymouth, and attempting at the same moment to wrest the dagger from her grasp. But this was not to be easily done; and in the hand to hand struggle which ensued, the point grazed her throat, so that the blood flowed freely.

"Mad—mad—yes, I am mad!" she cried; "but not mad enough to be frightened at such a stream as this;" and she resisted as earnestly as she could their attempts to stay the bleeding.

But let me not dwell on the terrors of a scene like this. Too many hearts there are so darkly learned that they can remember tragedies of human life, whose lurid light enables them to realise and understand those storms of passion which happier and less sadly experienced mortals can but feebly picture; scenes in which some human heart seems in its anguish torn open, its sacred depths laid bare, and unimagined horrors dragged to light! Before midnight Florentia raved in the delirium of brain fever! Raved chiefly of those two who were her

most tender watchers—of her husband and Geraldine Harmer—recognising them at intervals, and perpetually joining their hands!

Physicians crowded round her, but all their efforts were unavailing. By and by her thoughts receded to the days of her childhood, and she talked of her tropical home and her dark-browed mother; yea, even with more precision than she had ever done by the light of life and reason! Oh, Death and Madness! what mysteries are in your presence and your coming!

By degrees all newer memories were swept from the seared and troubled mind, until she spoke only of those early years; of Netta the negress; her mother; the shipwreck; and the scene of confiding the dagger; but here she broke into the jargon of that mother tongue so long forgotten, and the words which might have been the revealing of an untold tale, died on the air without leaving a memory or a meaning behind them. And who shall say oblivion was not the best grave for a record so dread!

And Florentia, the young and the beautiful, died in the flower of her days; died in her sorrow and madness; died clasped fondly by the two whose hearts for long years she had sundered; the two whom her death would, in the sure course of measured time, again make one; the two whose souls were yet so wrung by the anguish of that last scene, that not a thought of self had place in

either heart, where not one gleam of light from the future had power to dispel the agony of the present.

It were a common figure of speech to say that Geraldine Harmer would have died to save that young life, and make its happiness. She had died a darker death for her sake—and another's—years ago. And not less true is it that at this dread hour the heart of Lionel Weymouth melted to a tenderness and affection he had not known even in the days of his passionate worship. The girlish wife—the early dead—the mother of his children—the once so wildly loved, were attributes that moulded into a sentiment and took root in his nature too deeply henceforth to change or depart.

How strange those two should mourn the dead together, and yet how natural! cherishing each token of her presence, and embalming her memory by every affectionate tribute! Why had she lived at all, or come like a meteor across their path?

For some great purpose, inscrutable here, but decreed by a Power to whom our wisdom is folly.

How strange the second wooing of Geraldine Harmer by Lionel Weymouth — and yet how natural! Life now wore a soberer hue than it had done some twenty years before; but though happiness seemed less ecstatic, it was more serene and secure. She, whose woman's life has thus been pencilled forth, is indeed a loving "mother" to the Geraldine and Florentia, who, "sisters" in truth, are almost

shielded by guardian hands from even children's sorrows. But the Life of the Heart? Ah, that for *them* is still in the future.

Time heals ever as he touches; softening even the harshest outlines by distance; and there is not a thing in the past of which Lionel Weymouth and his wife cannot now talk freely and calmly. They stood one day near the drawing-room window already mentioned. It was months after their marriage, and two years since Florentia's death. Her children were playing in the verandah before them; the younger grown something more grave with the increase of two years to her little life, while the elder had become gayer in like proportion; so that strangers would have failed to see the different outlines of character, which they who loved them best nevertheless understood.

"Geraldine," said Lionel—his arm was round her waist, and he had been looking fondly in her face for a minute or two—"Geraldine, in my eyes you were never so beautiful as you now are. No, not even in the bloom of youth. I loved you *then* as well as my untried nature was capable of loving; but had I loved you as you deserved to be loved, I should not even have seen the change which I suppose ten years of absence worked. Or if I had seen I should have approved—should have felt that to be other than yourself precisely would have left something wanting—should have thought and known ——" He paused a moment.

“What?” asked Geraldine, looking up, and fondly kissing the hand she held in hers.

“I should have known,” he replied, “that Love depends for its birth and existence on something quite irrespective of Youth and Beauty.”



THE ADOPTED.

CHAPTER I.

"My arm shall give thee help to bear thee hence."

KING JOHN.

"This is the prettiest low-born lass that ever
Ran on the green sward; nothing she does or seems,
But smacks of something greater than herself;
Too noble for this place."

A WINTER'S TALE.

MANY of the county towns of England bear a striking family likeness to one another, though with local differences it is true, which sufficiently mark their individuality. The churches, the town-hall, the market, betray their kindred, and show in how much they usually differ from metropolitan edifices. But the High-street is the spot which could never be mistaken for London; especially in those old cities which still preserve, or did so till very lately, some of the picturesque inconveniences of our ancestors. For instance, narrow foot-paths and imperfect paving, and a few ancient dwellings that look, each one, like a pyramid reversed tottering on its apex;

making the stranger involuntarily quicken his steps as he passes beneath the overhanging stories.

Castlemills was a town of this description twenty years ago; and he indeed would have been a prophet of note who could have foretold that, by this time, a railroad would have brought it within three hours' journey of the metropolis; that the old, dark, low-roomed houses would be pulled down to make way for a bright-looking modern "station;" that the stage-coaches would be broken up for fire-wood, and the posting-inn be converted into a Temperance hotel. Yet these things have come to pass, and many others in their wake; silent blessings that have been often ushered in by the railroads' faithful helpers—cheap literature and the penny-postage.

It was the scene of an election; and though the young even remembered many candidates for the honour of representing the borough, and could call to mind more than one election, never "in the memory of the oldest inhabitant" had the town been in such a commotion. It had used to assemble a set of voters so nearly of one mind, that for years they always returned, by a large majority, a member staunch to a certain line of politics—we will not stay to particularise *which*. But latterly the people had run into the opposite way of thinking, and like most of us, when we have seized on a new opinion, were violent in the extreme. Grey heads were shaken, and dark forebodings breathed, and the present mania was attributed, by the oracles of the place,

to everything but the simple cause, that during the last seven years many fresh young minds had shed their influence upon the community; while the most active supporters of the old cause had sunk, one by one, into the grave, without leaving a successor. Whatever the cause, however, the fact remained, that Mr. Aimington, who, seven years before, had been returned almost unanimously, and carried from the hustings in triumph by his boisterous constituents, was now not only defeated with scorn, but pelted, maltreated, and his very life placed in danger by the excited mob. Even his friends were, for the most part, lukewarm, only voting for him to keep out his opponent. They did say, indeed, that he had wavered in his opinions; and to own that he is wiser now than he was a year ago, may require moral courage in a politician, but somehow or another is never estimated as a virtue in him. Perhaps, however, had he changed more decidedly, he might have pleased the other party; as it was, he gave satisfaction to none.

Yet in that angry excited crowd there were many honest men who cried "Shame, shame!" when they saw the fearful missiles flung at poor Mr. Aimington, who was now a grey-headed man in the decline of life, and moreover of a slender frame, and apparently in delicate health. Loudest in these vociferations, most active in his endeavours to calm the furious mob, was Richard Greyleigh, a miller, a high-hearted yeoman, and a man of Herculean

power. A stone had cut Mr. Aimington's cheek, and the sight of the blood trickling from it raised the indignation of the honest fellow to fever heat. Armed now with triple strength, he parted the crowd as if it had but consisted of school-boys—hurling, however, many a full-grown man to the ground on either side, till he reached the feeble friends who surrounded the unsuccessful candidate; when he placed his burly figure—he was six feet two, and a model of manly symmetry—before him. He wore his miller's coat, and was a fine mark for the discontented; but though he continued to shield Mr. Aimington with his own person till that gentleman reached his carriage, Greyleigh escaped without any serious injury, though he certainly bore evidence of the fray.

“How can I thank you, my brave protector—to whom is it that I am so much indebted?” exclaimed the persecuted gentleman, as he cordially shook the hand of the warm-hearted miller; “one I am sure who has voted on the right side.”

“That have I, sir, these five elections—I stick to my father's principles, and his father's before him; but as to being indebted to me, sir, I must have been something more contemptible than a coward to have stood quietly by. Those precious rascals! I wonder they are not ashamed to call themselves Englishmen. Such as them to talk of choosing law-makers—it wasn't so when I was a lad.”

"But your name, my good friend? I remember you well enough, but forget where I saw you."

"Richard Grayleigh, at your honour's service. We live down by the mill yonder, t'other side of the hill."

"Oh, the pretty farm-house, and the rosy children! I remember them all well."

And it was quite true that, amid the hundreds of constituents Mr. Aimington had visited during the canvassing, the miller's family had made sufficient impression to be distinctly remembered.

It was a bright summer day that following the election, when, about the hour of noon, the miller and his family were seated at their homely dinner. The children, eight in number, seemed of all imaginable ages, varying really from a well-grown notable girl of fifteen to an infant six months old, who slept in its rustic cradle through the no small din of knives and forks. Beans and bacon formed the sumptuous fare; but it might have been observed that something more dainty had been provided for the youngest at table—a little girl of four years old. Partly because she had been so long *the* youngest, and partly because, being of a slighter make, she had been considered the most delicate, Fanny had grown to be the acknowledged pet of them all. The truth was, she only looked delicate by comparison with her yet more ruddy and robust brothers and sisters. A stranger who looked at her brilliant complexion—sun-burned where not

shaded by the rich brown hair which waved—not crisped—naturally; or marked her finely-cut lips, red as the field-poppy just then stuck in her russet frock; or, more than all, peered into her full soft eyes—the hue of the violet when the sun shines on it through its bath of dew—would have owned that her beauty did not all arise from the uncommon intelligence of her face, but owed a fair half of its lustre to the pure animal health and enjoyment which beamed through all.

This was the party—seated in the farm-house kitchen—disturbed by the unexpected visit of Mr. and Mrs. Aimington. So briskly had the carriage driven up, and so quickly had the visitors alighted, that there could be no preparation for their reception. Nature, however, is an excellent teacher of manners when people feel rightly, especially when difference of station is so distinctly marked as to prevent either party taking up a false position. Thus, though the miller's wife bethought herself that her guests should have been shown into the Sunday parlour, she did not insist on their retiring thither, after Mrs. Aimington had drawn her Indian shawl more tightly round, and assured her that though it was summer she did not find the heat of the fire at all disagreeable. It was an exciting meeting for all; a proud moment for the miller's wife. Mrs. Aimington struggled for composure; but when she saw Greyleigh's bruised face—one eye blackened and swollen up—she burst into tears,

and, taking the honest miller's brawny hand between both her own, poured forth the strongest expressions of gratitude. Mr. Aimington was little less overcome while he besought Greyleigh to look upon him as a friend, and point out in what manner he could serve him. Nothing, however, touched the parents' hearts so much as the kindly notice they took of the children; nor was it, as is so often the case, an assumption of manner, for, bereaved years ago of their own offspring, love of children was with them almost a passion. Little Fanny, neglected for a few moments, had yet scrambled from her high chair, and, seeming to understand that it would be very uncourteous of the house-dog to bark or growl, had clasped her arms round Punch's neck, as if to keep him quiet. Punch, be it known, was a faithful, sagacious creature, though about the ugliest cur in the parish, having, in fact, been named from his grotesque appearance.

"Come and give me a kiss, little darling," said Mrs. Aimington, in the winning voice which children so easily recognise; and Punch was released, though he chose to follow Fanny and plant himself near the strangers. She took the child upon her knee, and, attracted by some trinket the lady wore, it showed no inclination to leave her. Not, however, till Mrs. Aimington had expressed her intention of calling again shortly, and had placed a purse containing twenty sovereigns in Dame Greyleigh's hand—saying, "Mr. Aimington cannot bear to offer

your husband money—between us wives, you know, it is different; *you* must accept this from *me*”—did they talk of leaving.

Fanny prattled away fearlessly. “Love Punch too,” she lisped, as a sort of answer to the lady’s caresses. “Punse, Punse!” and Punch came, and was patted and noticed.

“So you love Punch very much?” said Mrs. Aimington, evidently amused with her artless manner. “Do you know, I have a pet dog in the carriage?—will you come and see him?” she continued; and, of course, the chatterbox was delighted at the idea.

Bijou was a thorough-bred King Charles; and certainly, with his bright eyes and long silky ears, formed a very striking contrast to honest Punch. Fanny found him lying on a pile of shawls, one side of the carriage being devoted to his accommodation.

“Love Bijou too!” cried Mrs. Aimington, parodying the child’s own words as she was lifted in; and really so very well did little Fanny seem inclined to obey, that the difficulty was to separate them. “Let her have a ride with us,” said Mrs. Aimington; “we will bring her back in an hour.”

And so they did.

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CHAPTER II.

"I see thee not—I hear thee not—but none
Can be so wrapt in thee,—

* * * * *

To aid thy mind's development,—to watch
Thy dawn of little joys,—to sit and see
Almost thy very growth,—to view thee catch
Knowledge of objects,—wonders yet to thee!—
To hold thee lightly on a gentle knee,
And print on thy soft cheek a parent's kiss,—
This, it should seem, was not reserved for me."

BYRON.

SUMMER had deepened into autumn. Without puzzling themselves to trace cause and effect, the children noticed that the shadow of the mill at noon grew every day longer and longer, just when they would most have enjoyed the sunshine; and that the early sun-set was now behind the church, instead of through the elm trees. And while the sun narrows his journey, and lengthens the noon-day shadows, do human hearts stand still?

The bitter feelings engendered by the election had melted away by the kindly touch of passing time; and newer events had driven the subject from the thoughts and lips of the inhabitants of Castlemills. There had been no day, however, in which Mr. and Mrs. Aimington had not been mentioned in Greyleigh's family.

The day's toil was over. The little ones were in bed, and the miller and his wife, with the elder children, were sitting round the cheerful fire—some of them within the old-fashioned chimney corner—the comfort of which the biting air of early November made them fully appreciate. Yet the party were more than commonly grave. Twice had Greyleigh's pipe gone out from mere absence of mind; and thrice had his wife laid down her knitting to wipe away the falling tears.

"But, Peggy, woman," said Greyleigh, after a pause, "are you sure of what you say? are you sure they want to take our Fanny from us, and make a lady of her outright? She's a prettier plaything than them dogs and parrots; and I don't wonder at their liking to have her up at the Hall for days together, as they've done so often. But she'll grow out of being a plaything, and what then?"

"I only tell you, Richard," replied the mother, "what Mrs. Aimington's own maid said to me when she brought the child home to-day, by way of preparing me, as she said, for what was coming. Though I believe she expected me to be out of my wits with joy, instead of my bursting into tears of sorrow. It is because they've been so good to us that I am so unhappy; otherwise there would be nothing to do but to say, 'we won't give up our child.' I know they've set their minds upon it, and we shall be called ungrateful: and even the child herself—oh!

it is that which makes me so unhappy ;” and sobs again impeded her utterance.

“Fanny herself!” returned the miller. “What is it you mean?” and he laid his hand affectionately on his wife’s shoulder.

“I mean that when she does come home, she pines after the playthings and sweetmeats, and all the fine things up at the Hall; even after the fine clothes, for what I know; for the maid told me Mrs. Aimington has got a regular set of things for her; and that when she goes out in the carriage she looks for all the world like one of the tip-top gentle folks.”

“Our Fanny! Well, we always said she ought to have been born a lady.”

“I wish we hadn’t said so.”

There was another pause. For a little while the miller smoked vigorously away at his pipe: but it would not do; he threw it down and passed his sleeve across his eyes.

“Peggy,” said he, in a husky voice, “for seventeen years you’ve been a good wife to me; and all that time we have never been parted for seventeen hours together. As the children came, they clung round us, and have never been parted either; and whatever people may say about ‘good luck,’ this will be a hard trial to us. If times were altogether thriving, it might be right of us to refuse this offer for our Fanny; but you know I have not yet paid off all the mortgage with which my poor

father encumbered the farm. If I live a few years longer, I may hope with God's blessing, to do so, and leave Dick a free man. Yet when seasons are bad, you know it is as much as we can do to live and pay our way, and I doubt if we have a right to refuse this good thing for our child; for her, too, who never looks as if she would be able to work like the others."

The mother wept on, and Greyleigh continued:—"Mr. Aimington, too, has been the most generous friend we ever had. How could we have apprenticed John to the turnery business but for him; and the lad had so set his heart upon it, that I doubt if he would have steadied to anything else. Ah! and he goes away next week: that will be another parting, though a very different one. But to lose little Fanny!"—

"I wonder," murmured the wife, after another pause, "I wonder if she will grow proud and despise her poor father and mother?"

"If I thought she would ever be so wicked," said the miller, in a firmer tone than before, "she should never run the chance of being corrupted. Yet human nature is human nature, and we must make up our minds that she won't seem like one of us."

"I feel as if she would be dead to us," returned Dame Greyleigh: then, continuing, as if a new train of thoughts had arisen, "I wonder if riches make the heaven they seem to do."

That night the tearful parents bent over the rude bed of their darling. An elder girl slept by her side, and it chanced that Fanny had turned away from her sister, and fallen asleep, clasping tightly a richly-dressed doll she had been allowed to bring home.

"God bless her!" exclaimed Greyleigh, in a husky voice; "may she never blame us for giving her up to the strangers."

But the mother sank upon her knees, and woke the unconscious child with her loud sobs and passionate tears.

Yes, Fanny Greyleigh was given up to "the strangers;" and there is no need to describe minutely the conflicting feelings and duties which struggled for the mastery in the hearts of her honest parents. If some there be who consider the trust of a parent one too sacred to be, on any pretence, transferred to another, many would have accused the Greyleighs, had they used such an argument, of adopting it as a cloak for their own selfishness. Yet, right or wrong in the abstract, they did well; for they acted upon principle, giving up their child because they believed their doing so was every way to her advantage, and because, had they refused that which was urged as a favour by their benefactors, they would have accused themselves of the blackest ingratitude. How far Mr and Mrs. Aimington were actuated by principle, events will best show. And yet it may as well be owned at once that their offer was prompted

by nothing more worthy than a good impulse—if that can be called good which was three parts selfish. They were fond of children; fond, as many people are, with a sort of animal instinct, and, as the father had hinted, preferred the beautiful and intelligent little Fanny, for a pet, to the dogs and parrots. But it did not sink into their minds that in removing her from the guardianship and guidance of her own humble parents, they had in reality taken upon themselves the duties, and incurred the responsibilities, of father and mother. Nor did they even clearly define to themselves whether they intended educating "The Adopted" in her own sphere, or raising her, by education, companionship, and the bestowal of fortune, to theirs. They were almost content to think of her only as a present pet and plaything.

As, however, they were "kind-hearted" people, they neither wished nor intended to separate little Fanny entirely from her parents. On the contrary, it was arranged that, for the present, she should visit them every Sunday after church time, accompanied by Mrs. Aimington's maid, Johnson by name. The first meeting was not a very trying one. The child looked so beautiful in the elegant dress in which she was attired, and pleased with three days' petting at the Hall, and too young to understand the holy ties which had just been sundered, she smiled so joyously, and prattled away so happily that the unselfish parents almost forgot their own

loss in looking at and listening to her. One little week, however, worked some change; the smile came and went, but the prattle was less; and when the parting moment arrived, her lips trembled, and the deep blue eyes looked yet deeper, through her tears.

"Oh, fie, Miss Fanny," said Johnson, "what will mamma Aimington say to see you crying? Nobody loves little girls who cry."

But the MOTHER caught her to her heart, and—rocking to and fro in a paroxysm of feeling, while the child's arms were locked round her neck—showed that *she*, at least, loved her none the less for her "natural tears."

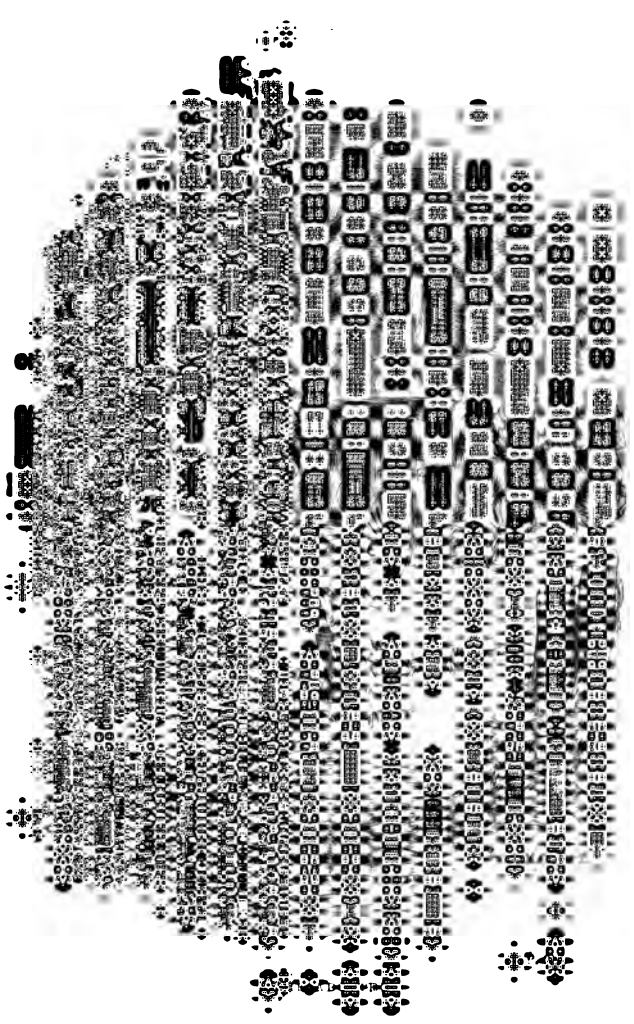
The following Sunday the case was worse; and then the parents, with that quiet heroism which is the very essence of true courage, resolved that they would for a while sacrifice the joy of seeing her, with the hope and belief that she would grow reconciled to her new home, when not reminded of her old one. It would be doing Mr. and Mrs. Aimington injustice to say that they were not touched by this instance of devotion in the miller and his wife (for the suggestion was theirs); but the conduct of "the benefactors" not having the root of principle, there was nothing in their hearts to be strengthened by the fact, though impulse led them to indulge the child even more than heretofore, the surest way, as they believed, to make her love them.

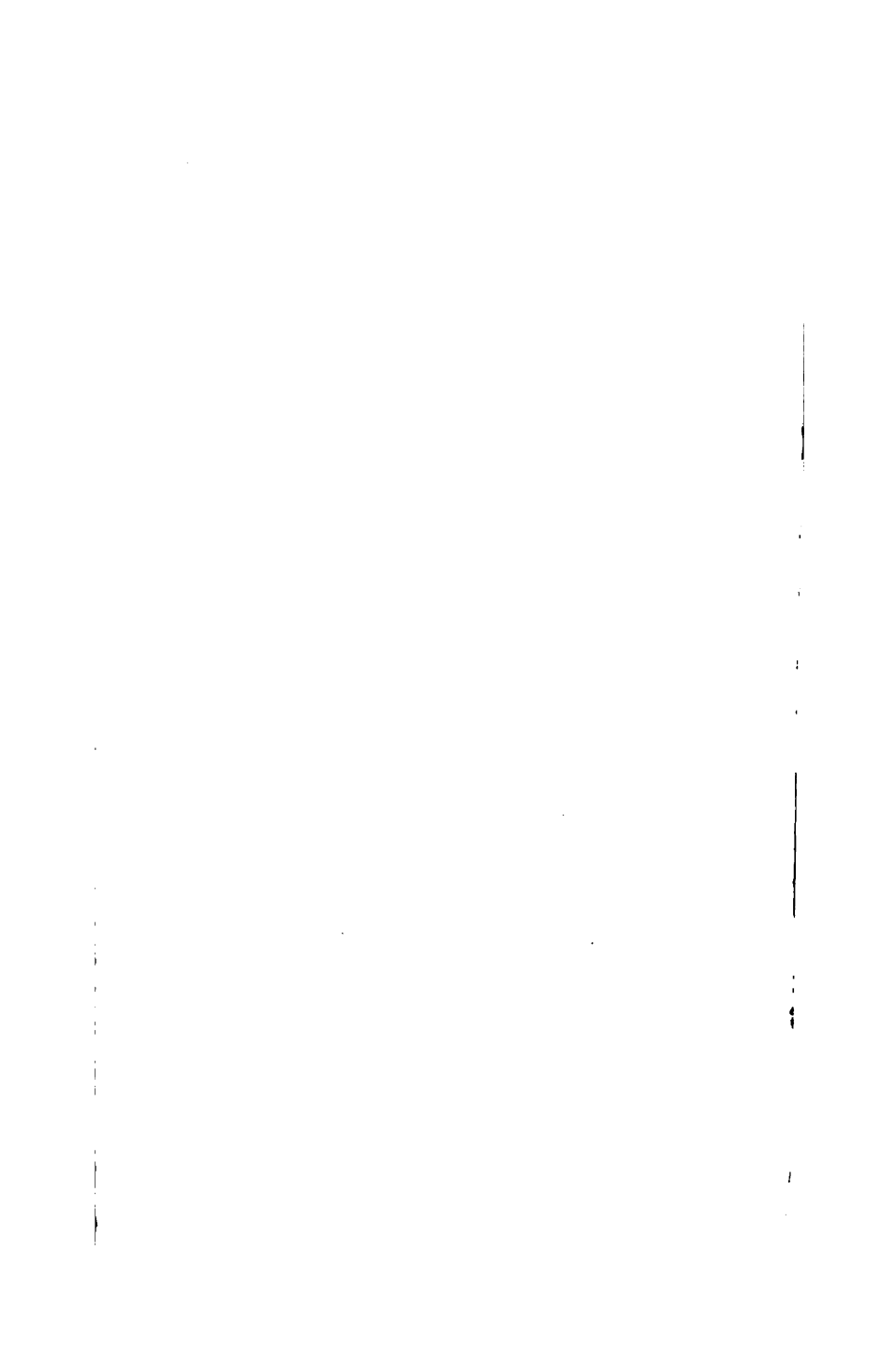
Yet had the Aimingtons been actuated by a keen consciousness of the responsibility they had undertaken, well do we know that the natural feelings of affection in such parents as the Greyleighs would have been the same; and the wrench from all home-ties, even to the childish heart of little Fanny, would have been as violent. But in this case, witnessing the struggle would have made yet more clear the duties which devolved on Mr. and Mrs. Aimington; as it was, the effect was but temporary. Only once more was Fanny brought to the farm house, before she accompanied her "mamma and papa" to London for the season. It proved to them a long one; and when after six months they returned to the Hall, a change in their *protégée* was indeed perceptible. The heart of a child of four years old is very flexible: she *was* reconciled to her new home. The parents saw the truth at a glance, and though they sighed they would not for worlds have had it otherwise. But when she shrank from her boisterous brothers, and smoothed her white frock after the hugging and kissing of her sisters, the children felt she was no longer one of them; and as they were simple specimens of human nature, neither better nor worse than the average, something like envy crept into their minds. Poor Punch even seemed almost forgotten: at all events, she was afraid of him now.

Three years passed swiftly away unmarked by any striking event; unless, indeed, it be worth

noticing that once after an illness—some malady children usually encounter—which attacked little Fanny in London, change of air was recommended, and she was sent *home* for a few weeks to recruit her health. Great was the joy of the parents; yet sad the second parting: and even the child showed that her affectionate feelings had rather been frozen over than their springs dried up. Perhaps it was the happiest thing for all parties that, at the end of three years, Mr. and Mrs. Aimington determined on leaving England for an indefinite period, travelling in the south of Europe having been recommended by Mr. Aimington's physicians; and Fanny, of course, accompanied them.

Notwithstanding she had paid a visit to the farm-house the preceding day, to take leave of her relatives, the parents pined for one more lingering look. As the carriage, with its closely-packed imperial and many travelling appendages, passed down the high road, about a mile from the mill, two anxious watchers might have been noticed; and there, indeed, had they loitered for a couple of hours. But, alas! as it whirled rapidly by, they saw but the back of a little pink silk bonnet. Fanny was standing looking out at the opposite window!





CHAPTER III.

"If we sincerely want to accommodate or befriend our neighbours, we must really bestir ourselves for the purpose, and actually write the letter, or go the errand, or pay the visit which may be necessary. Nothing *tells* but the performance. In reality, the *action* often costs less trouble than the contemplation of it. We often voluntarily triple the sacrifice by encumbering our minds with a load of intention and keeping it there for hours or for days."

ROBERT CHAMBERS.

It is beyond our purpose to follow Fanny Greyleigh and her protectors in their travels and wanderings, though they visited not a few of the spots immortalised by historians and poets; hurrying on when the scene was barren—pausing at their own free will in pleasant places. And thus eight years passed away, working their wonders. How like dissolving views do the different scenes of human life pass from one to the other!

Children at the farm had grown into men and women, and some had gone out into the world to seek their fortunes "in service;" for times had not become better, and the mortgage was still unredeemed. Eight years of care, more than of labour, had shown their work both on Greyleigh and his wife; both seemed to have turned the hill, and to be in the decline of life. They had lost, too, something of the cheerfulness which had supported them

amid the struggles of earlier years; it might be they began to distrust hope, which had so often deceived them. They had received many letters from Fanny, and great were their pride and astonishment at her beautiful writing, and, as they considered it, wonderful learning. Yet, truth to tell, her education had been woefully neglected; for Mr. and Mrs. Aimington, never having quite made up their minds as to her future position in society, had neither systematically afforded her the opportunities of acquiring a solid and refined education, such as would have fitted her for their sphere, nor given her the useful information which would have rendered her a happy and respected member of her own.

Still Fanny Greyleigh, at fifteen, was very far from ignorant. In the first instance, Johnson had, at Mrs. Aimington's desire, taught her to read, and being like an only child, without playmates or associates, she had taken to reading as an amusement. At the Hall a well-stocked library was always accessible; and thus at a very early age she acquired much desultory information. The best books—sterling works—were naturally selected for travelling companions, and of new ones only those of approved merit were ordered to be sent from England. This narrower selection was, however, a great advantage to Fanny, for it in some sort directed her reading; while intercourse with persons of refined manners formed her own, and the

habit of hearing her own language spoken correctly prevented her from falling into any glaring errors. She had even picked up a little French and Italian, and, having shown great facility in acquiring them, had been indulged with a few lessons at distant intervals. For music she had a decided taste, and thus was able to improve the very trifling instruction she had received, though, after all, she played chiefly by ear.

Such was Fanny Greyleigh, with her taste more cultivated than her mind, when she returned to England, a beautiful womanly girl of fifteen. She was too grateful, as well as too young and inexperienced yet, to feel how undecided was her position—one hour treated as an equal, and the next perhaps employed in some office which, though nothing more menial than a child in the highest rank of life might perform for a parent, yet lost its sanctity when required from her in the presence of strangers. As a matter of course, visitors scarcely knew if they were to treat her as a humble dependant or an equal; and one lady, an intimate friend of the family, was rather surprised to find Fanny seated next herself at dinner, after having observed that she had answered Mrs. Aimgton's bell to assist at her toilet. This occurred in London, immediately after the travellers arrived from the continent, and before they returned to the Hall, where, during the autumn, they expected several friends to visit them.

Perhaps it was Fanny's first meeting with her family, who were still remembered with affection, and the consciousness that the little presents she had brought them — purchased with her own pocket-allowance—were quite inappropriate, which taught her to think of and feel her own different position.

"My dear," said Mrs. Aimington one morning to her husband, "here is an invitation to a large party at Selton-place, and a note from Lady Selton, begging we will bring Fanny with us. Really it is so unexpected that I hardly know what to do; besides she is so young."

"Oh, never mind her being young," said Mr. Aimington, "she has had very little pleasure since we came home; let her go."

"But, my dear, I think there are other considerations; and, lately, I have been thinking we ought to make up our minds more decidedly about the dear child. You know when we were in Rome"—

"You wanted me to let her have more regular instruction, and perhaps it would have been wise; though, after all, I do not see that she is so very deficient."

"Come, Mr. Hardwick," said the lady, addressing a gentleman who was present, and appealing to her husband by a look, "you shall decide whether Fanny is to go or not. You know, when we were abroad, you more than once gave us a gentle lecture on indecision."

"If I did speak so boldly, I hope that you forgave me," replied Mr. Hardwick, a young, but very clever medical man, who had travelled with them for nearly a year, and was extremely intimate with them still; "but my excuse must be, that I have suffered painfully in my own family from the error of indecision."

"Then you shall decide," returned Mrs. Aimington, "for you have an old head upon young shoulders. You are aware exactly who Fanny is, and I know she is such a pet of yours that you will decide for her advantage."

"Since, my dear madam, you really do me the honour of asking my opinion, I will give it with my customary frankness. Introducing Miss Greyleigh into society is an important step; insomuch that it stamps the fact that you wish her to be considered as a lady, and your adopted daughter. I confess I think so highly of her sweet disposition, her manners, and her natural character, that I should think her an acquisition to any sphere."

"It is easy to see which way you lean," cried Mr. Aimington, with a smile.

"My dear friends—for such you allow me to call you"—returned the other, "I do feel deeply interested for your *protégée*. You have made her, or can make her, so fit to adorn society, and enjoy the refinements of life, while she is already so unfitted for a lower rank, that I own it grieves me to see her placed in a doubtful or equivocal position."

Yet, though trifling the question of going or not going to a party may appear, introducing her at Lady Selton's would certainly be passing the Rubicon, for the world would consider it as the seal of her condition."

"Poor child!" returned Mr. Aimington; "I should be grieved if she ever felt slighted or neglected."

"Let us think it over, my dear," said the lady; "it will be time enough to send an answer to-morrow or next day."

How characteristic was each rejoinder! The kindly *impulse*, which looked not beyond the present, and shrunk from inflicting temporary pain; and the fatal procrastination, which puts off every burden till "to-morrow." True, most true, that the subject required consideration and reflection, for which two days were far too little time. But they had had eleven years "to think it over," and were still undecided! However, as in this case a decision must be made, the kind and present impulse prevailed. Without Mr. Hardwick's words being altogether forgotten, the impression they made passed in some measure away; it was arranged that Fanny should accompany her benefactors to Lady Selton's, while they considered they had made up their minds to treat her as an equal, though not without some regrets at her neglected education, and many resolutions, even now, to make up for it. Yet with all these faults of indecision and procrastination

tination—faults whose effects we would faintly attempt to shadow forth—Mr. and Mrs. Aimington loved Fanny Greyleigh dearly, more dearly, perhaps, than they themselves knew. In the limited intercourse the child had held with her parents, they had impressed her so strongly with the sense of her own and their obligations to Mr. and Mrs. Aimington, that her young heart overflowed with grateful and affectionate feelings; and her disposition was naturally so sweet, that even over, and often injudicious, indulgence could not spoil her.

Blessings are somewhere quaintly compared to “birds which hop about us with their wings folded, the brilliancy of whose plumage we never see till they are flying away.” Such a “bird” to them was Fanny Greyleigh; something more worthy than the “dogs and parrots,” not only to love but *to be loved by*; an eager listener to the thrice told tale, a ready messenger from room to room, a gentle and—for her years—most clever nurse to two frequent invalids. No one knew so well as Fanny how to fold a shawl or place the sofa cushions; no one could so exactly mix an effervescing draught, or sweeten tea, or even scent a handkerchief. How they would have missed her!

CHAPTER IV.

"This night I hold an old accustom'd feast,
 Whereto I have invited many a guest
 Such as I love ; and you, among the store.
 One more, most welcome, makes my number more.
 * * * * *

I thought thy disposition better tempered."

ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE evening of the party arrived, and Fanny attired judiciously in a dress of simple white, tapped at Mrs. Aimington's dressing-room, inquiring if she could be of any use.

"No, thank you, my love. But come in, I have something for you."

Mrs. Aimington was splendidly dressed, and her maid was in the act of clasping on some dazzling jewels. The box which had contained them and many others was open, and taking thence a single row of pearls, she called Fanny towards her, saying, "I shall lend you a necklace my love ; I think this will be the best for you"—paused for a moment while her pleased *protégée* admired its beauty, and then placed it herself round her neck.

"Mr. Hardwick, why do you call me Miss Greyleigh ?" said Fanny, just before they stepped into the carriage ; "I feel as if I must have been a naughty child and that you wont forgive me," she

added with a smile, as if half conscious that in her ball dress and pearls she must have passed the age of "naughty-child"-hood.

"I am practising in private what I intend to perform in public," replied Mr. Hardwick.

"But why do you?" returned Fanny.

"For a good and sufficient reason, *Miss Greyleigh*,"—and as he spoke he handed her into the carriage.

It was rather a select and elegant party than a large one; but precisely because this was the case, was Fanny's introduction at it an important step. Towards the middle of the evening, Lady Selton—who was a young hostess—might have been observed for a few minutes in earnest conversation with Mr. Hardwick, after which the latter crossed the room, and took a vacant seat next Fanny Greyleigh.

"Fanny," said he, "though you have promised to dance the next quadrille with me, I am going to be so rude as to transfer you to another partner;—will you forgive me?"

"Yes, as you call me Fanny, for I suppose I am now a good child again."

"That was a slip of the tongue, *Miss Greyleigh*."

"But why am I not to dance with you?"

"When I was a little boy, good children or naughty children used to be told 'not to ask questions;' but as a wiser generation adopt a wiser plan, I must answer you, *Miss Greyleigh* I am

a nobody, and I think it to your advantage to dance this evening with one or two somebodies—to whom Lady Selton is going to introduce you.”

“What *do* you mean?”

“Exactly what I have said.”

Without quite understanding her kind friend’s meaning, Fanny coloured slightly—she would have found it difficult to say why; but, with true feminine tact, she turned the conversation, saying, “How lucky that I learnt dancing: you said I should be sure to find it useful.”

Yes! the “Somebodies” of the party danced with the miller’s daughter, who from that evening might be said to have entered the charmed circle of the *élite* of the county. Yet the rapid decline of Mr. Aimington’s health became soon afterwards so marked, that her first was almost her last party; but in the home circle of more limited visiting, there was henceforth, as Mr. Hardwick had predicted, no misapprehension about the real position of “The Adopted.” The comparative exemption from scenes of gaiety, in which too many girls at her age are almost absorbed, was of the greatest advantage, for she retained the simplicity of character and manner which under other circumstances she might have been so likely to lose.

Thus time passed on, bringing, however, no more regular instruction for Fanny; but much real improvement from reading and observation. Yet were her days chiefly occupied in watchful and

affectionate attendance on those she regarded as parents. Not only was Mr. Aimington so confirmed an invalid as to be seldom able to leave the house, but his wife, always what is called "delicate," became yet more feeble. Though they seemed themselves scarcely conscious of the glaring truth, they were, in reality, growing old.

Thus evenly glided away three years. Mr. Hardwick was settled in the metropolis, slowly but surely forming for himself a practice there. During these three years, however, a line of railway had been opened, which, annihilating time and space, enabled him frequently to visit his valued friends.

"Mrs. Aimington," said he, one day when he chanced to be alone with the lady, "you used to tell me I was the most candid person you knew : I am going to prove to you that I have not outgrown my frankness. And yet," he added with a sigh, "I am almost selfish enough to regret the good which I have sometimes flattered myself proceeded from my last especial exhibition of frankness."

"Do you mean," replied Mrs. Aimington, "our conversation long ago about Fanny? I assure you I have often rejoiced that we took your advice."

"Believe me, I too have often rejoiced : always, when not overpowered by the selfish wish that Fanny Greyleigh's station had still remained undecided, so that—that—my humble offer might at least have presented one advantage—that of

exchanging an equivocal for a fixed and honourable position. As it is, I fear—I suspect—you have other views. I scarcely dare to ask you, if I may seek her for my wife?”

Walter Hardwick had spoken with emotion, for he felt deeply, and loved Fanny with manly sincerity. Yet he remembered that he was under obligations to Mr. Aimington for *early* patronage, the only patronage which can win gratitude; for when success has couched the eyes of the blind, so that the dullest acknowledge it, “the world” feels shame in not-seeing. A noble heart like his could not forget this truth, and suspecting, but with too good reason; that they had other views for their *protégée*, he had refrained from word; and he believed from look or manner, which could betray his affection to the object of it.

“I thank you, my dear sir, for your candour,” said Mrs. Aimington, in reply to his honest confession, “and will answer you with equal frankness. You are aware that the death of our nephew, which took place last year, throws the entailed property after my husband’s death into a distant branch of the family; in fact, the next heir is a second cousin, Mr. James Aimington, whom I think you have met here occasionally?”

“I have seen him twice.”

“Only twice! To be sure we did not know him ourselves till within this twelvemonth; but he has been here a good deal lately. We have no reason

to doubt his being a very worthy person ; yet from only having seen him recently, it seems difficult to look upon him as our relation and successor. The fact is, it would be a consolation to think that when we are gone, the place would be inhabited by some one who would remember us with kindness and affection, and as we intend to bequeath to dear Fanny almost all our personal property, it would certainly make us very happy to find the young people liked each other, and, in short, to see them married ; to contemplate Fanny as the future mistress here, and to know that the property would again be united."

"Did I, my dear madam," returned Mr. Hardwick, "did I understand you rightly—do you only *intend* to provide for Miss Greyleigh? Forgive my reminding you of the uncertainty of life—the danger of delay."

"You blame Mr. Aimington," said the lady slightly colouring, "for not having already made a will in her favour ; but the truth is, he has never altered that which he signed years before we adopted her, in which he leaves everything of which he can dispose to me. He has always had perfect confidence, that if I proved the survivor, I should provide properly for Fanny. And I am quite sure if I should be taken first, he would not forget her. Indeed"—but here a violent fit of coughing prevented Mrs. Aimington from proceeding.

"And, Mr. Hardwick," said Fanny Greyleigh to him, in the course of the evening which followed the above conversation, "will you bring me the next time you come the song you were talking about last week? and will you ask your kind sister to match the wools for my worsted work?"

"I will send them to you without delay, for I fear I shall not be able to pay you a visit again for some time."

"Oh, why not?" inquired Fanny with evident regret.

"Do you think," returned Mr. Hardwick, assuming a tone of irony to cover his real emotion; "do you think I am a person of so little importance, and am so little wanted, that I can be spared for a whole day every week or two?"

"Ah! well, if you are so busy," sighed Fanny, "it is very thoughtless of me to add to your trouble. Never mind the song and the worsted."

"Indeed you shall have them; it is no trouble. By the way, shall I send them to Mr. James Aimington, and ask him to bring them."

"No, don't; he always forgets my commissions." Fanny looked up as she spoke, and at least Walter Hardwick had the strange satisfaction of feeling that though he might not have touched her heart, it was equally free from any impression in favour of his rival.

Perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Aimington were equally conscious of Fanny's indifference towards their

cousin. At all events, they shortly afterwards found means of hinting, rather than expressing, their wishes on the subject. Startled, indeed, was the simple-hearted girl when the conviction first dawned on her mind. True to her grateful nature, there is no wonder that she strove to the uttermost to think and feel as they would have her; but the heart is a strange rebel, often more ready to be sacrificed at the altar of duty than to obey its dictates. As for the gentleman in question, he appeared a perfect specimen of the commonplace class, though there were points of character about him that will be presently developed, which certainly redeemed him from belonging to it: just as a country abounding in pit-falls and quicksands as little deserves to be called a level plain as that which is beautifully diversified with hill and dale.

Many trifling circumstances revealed to him also the wishes of his relations, and James Aiming-ton began to play the wooer. That he was not very successful he knew; and this knowledge, added to the knowledge of his own real inferiority, piqued him to win her, with a feeling quite independent of any true regard. Yet as he was not a clever, nor even a shrewd person, he had not sufficient self command to hide from Fanny that his temper was irritated, though she, poor girl, did not know that it was *at her superiority*. As for those who had taken upon themselves the duties of parents towards their "adopted," they were too much engrossed by

their own ailments, or had, perhaps, from age or circumstances, so far outgrown the faculties of keen perception, that such shades of feeling in the "young people" were not even guessed at by them.

Such was the state of affairs, when Mrs. Aimington, requiring some purchases to be made in the neighbouring town, proposed one morning that the cousin should drive Fanny over to Castlemills, as she would be quite able to make the proper selection. Accordingly the pony phaeton was ordered, and, attended by a single servant, they proceeded on their mission. The shopping I need not particularise; it is enough that one of Fanny's commissions was to procure a little box, according to a certain pattern. The servant was a new one, nearly a stranger to the place and to the family, but knowing the sort of article that was wanted, he drew their attention to a shop which was apparently but recently opened, a workman being in the act of painting the first letter of a name above it. The wares, however, in the window, sufficiently proclaimed that it was a turner's shop, and Fanny and Mr. James alighted. Not finding precisely the article required, Fanny gave the order for one to be made according to the pattern; and drawing from its case one of her own engraved cards, wrote on the back of it minute directions to avoid the possibility of a mistake. By chance the young man behind the counter looked first at the side on which "Miss Greyleigh" was inscribed, and as he did so

his face flushed, and the next moment he raised his eyes inquiringly to Fanny, saying, in a trembling voice—

“Are *you* Miss Greyleigh?”

“That is my name,” she replied.

“And you don’t know me? No wonder, for I didn’t remember you a bit. To think of your being our little Fan, and of my not knowing you—I, who used to carry you on my shoulder many a day to make you the tallest of all. Well, Fan, shake hands with your brother, though you are in another sense so much above us all now!”

“Johnny, dear Johnny!” were the only words which escaped her lips; but not alone was her hand held out, a warm embrace followed, and a hearty kiss was given and received.

“And so you don’t forget all about old times and the Mill?” said the young tradesman, the tears starting to his eyes. “I know you don’t, though you are a lady, and every way belong to us no more. But didn’t you know I was married and set up in business here?”

“Indeed I did not; but it is long since I have paid a visit to the Mill. Neither, Johnny, must you judge me harshly for this seeming neglect. I——” but Fanny paused, for she did not choose to tell the simple truth that Mr. and Mrs. Aimington had (and perhaps wisely) contrived that latterly her visits should be as few and far between as possible. Of “excuses,” such as frequent excursions to London,

and almost constant attendance on the invalids, she might have found plenty; but her nature was too generous, and her heart at the moment too much touched to avail herself of them.

Meanwhile Mr. James had stood tapping his boot most vehemently with the light driving whip he had not relinquished; till, on the movement being made for Fanny to be introduced to her brother's wife—a tradesman's daughter, whose ready little fortune had enabled John Greyleigh to set up in business—he looked up, showing that his lips were white with suppressed anger, as he said,—

“I know not, Miss Greyleigh, how far my cousin and his lady may approve of this sort of thing. I am sure this young man—your brother did he say?—must see the impropriety of it; indeed I feel authorised in insisting that you return to the carriage.”

“Insisting!” murmured Fanny—the right pride that is confined to no station sending a flush to her cheek—“Pardon me,” and she extended her hand to the young wife with a kind and gentle smile. Yet, when in a few minutes afterwards she was seated in the phaeton on her return home, tears flowed abundantly. And why?

For many reasons. Young and inexperienced as she was, let it not be supposed that Fanny Greyleigh had remained even thus long unconscious of her *false position*; a phrase sufficiently expressive to those who understand it, though hard to be ex-

plained, so infinite are the circumstances which may modify it. Half the miseries in the world arise from people struggling to seem what they are not; and whether he strive or not, whoever attempts to pass current in society for something above what he *is*, must be in a false position; and, oh! not less so he, whom adventitious circumstances depress until society *underrates* him. The latter, indeed, is the more mournful case. Yet though neither of these phases exactly applies to Fanny, hers was, nevertheless, a false position, and hers the penalty of suffering. It would have been wiser and kinder of the Aimingtons to have adopted an orphan, or penniless child, in their own sphere of life—for, alas! how many of the well-born want! Or, if from taking a fancy to an individual, they chose to remove this humble child from the parental roof, surely it was their *duty*, by a consistent and most decided line of conduct, to guard her from the thorns they were sowing in her path.

CHAPTER V.

"With woe resigned, each mourner's heart
Beheld thy funeral train depart ;

* * *

Wooring brief was needed then,
Life had sterner work for men.
Plighted were those lovers twain,
Joy was in that wide domain,
When the suitor homeward hied
To make ready for his bride."

MRS. D. OGILVY'S "HIGHLAND MINSTRELST."

"And all went wrong and painfully enough—
No wonder, till, the right spot stumbled on,
All the jar stops and there is peace at once."

ROBERT BROWNING.

I KNOW it is not a very common thing for rich people to adopt poor children; but it is far too common for unthinking ones, from what is called kindness, but is cruelty, merely to gratify the caprice of a day, or a week, or a month, to unfit their humble friends for the duties and happiness of their own station. God forbid that I should seem for a moment to speak slightly of the humblest born, the poorest, or even the most ignorant; it is the performance of our duties in our station, whatever that station may be, which gives true respectability: it is moral worth which can make the peasant equal or superior to the prince, or as Burns in his own rich coinage hath it,

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that."

And it is because there is true happiness to be found in every station, that it is so great a mischief to unfit persons for that to which they are born, unless we have the power to place them absolutely in another. As for those who possess great talents it is another question: let such know and remember, that genius has the right as well as the power to make its path upwards—the "diamond" with which "to cut its bright way through" all obstacles.

But I am digressing. That Fanny Greyleigh felt something of all this may account for her tears; but the page she had just read in James Aimington's character was far more painful. She had been trying for some time to school her heart—and hard the task—to *like* him; and, as the surest way, had tried to persuade herself that she was dear to him. Now, she knew it was no *lover* who scorned her humble family and reproved herself so harshly. Yet with this knowledge came a joyful thought, like one bright star in a dark night,—the thought, the conviction that she never should be his; the sacrifice was greater than her guardians had a right to demand; and for the first time she saw clearly what her duties were to them, and what she also owed to herself. Mr. James Aimington showed yet more clearly his own ignoble mind, by continuing his harsh and unfeeling remonstrance during

the drive home. Nevertheless, Fanny's tears were dried when they alighted, and a resolution more than half formed, of telling Mrs. Aimington the real state of her heart with as little delay as possible. Alas! for our intentions. During their absence, Mrs. Aimington had, in a fit of coughing, ruptured a blood-vessel, and in a few hours she was no more!

It has often been remarked that when two old persons, who have lived in happiness and affection from early years together, are at last separated by the cold hand of death, the blow shakes rudely out the few remaining sands of the survivor. Surely it is one of the many merciful dispensations by which we are governed that it should be so. How strong must be the chain of habit and affection, which forty, fifty, sixty years have woven! Why, the strongest love of the young seems by comparison but the love of yesterday. Mr. Aimington was no exception to the rule. From the day of his wife's death he sank rapidly; his memory began to fail; it was evident his mind was tottering; and in less than a month he was seized with paralysis.

It has been said that Fanny felt her duties to be clearly defined; and it was this knowledge which supported her in the natural anguish of her bereavement, and sustained her through every trial. Wonderful were her exertions in the sick room, unwearied her gentle care and tender watching.

But it was no part of her duty to dream of any future self-sacrifice to James Aimington; and even in the house of mourning and of sickness she had found the opportunity of intimating to him as much. It may easily be imagined that a nature like his was stung to the quick by the rejection of the miller's daughter; but, as there was something about her which he could not despise, his feelings rankled very nearly to hatred.

Mr. Hardwick was frequently in attendance; but his practice had so much increased, that it was impossible for him to remain at the Hall more than an hour or two at a time. It was on an occasion when a marked change, apparently for the better, had taken place in the patient, that Mr. Hardwick beckoned Fanny from the room.

"Dear Miss Greyleigh," said he, taking her hand, "this is an hour in which we must all *act*. And I call upon you, for your own sake, and for the sake of those you love best, to conquer as much as possible the outward display of feeling, and prove your firmness. First send off an active servant to the nearest lawyer that he may be in readiness, should we need his services, if, as I fear—or, perhaps I should say, hope—he may be wanted. You told me the other day, in answer to my question, that you believed Mr. Aimington had made no new will; though all you knew was, that he had, since his poor wife's death, destroyed the one he signed some twenty years ago,

declaring his *intention* of speedily preparing another. Since the fit, his mind has never been, until now, in a state in which I could conscientiously speak to him on such a subject; and alas! unless all my experience deceives me, *this* is the last flicker of reason. I shall return to his bedside, and I only charge you to take care that for the next half hour we are not interrupted."

"It is of me you are thinking," said Fanny, wringing her hands: "better — far better, I should be penniless, than his last moments so distracted."

"You say so now," replied Mr. Hardwick, "and I honour you for the feeling. But, believe me, I should think that I shared in the guilt of others' delay and indecision did I lose the present opportunity;" and so saying, he left her without waiting for an answer.

Let us not linger over the harrowing scene which followed; the regret for past negligence, and the *impulse* which dictated a lavish and almost unwise atonement. Mr. Aimington soon became again speechless, though the last words he uttered were a blessing on "his child," as he called Fanny Greyleigh. A state of insensibility quickly followed, and in a few hours all was over.

"I tell you candidly," whispered Mr. Hardwick to Fanny, a few minutes before the will was opened, "that it was not I who recommended you should have so large a fortune; I only desired to see you

with a suitable independence. Yet as the wife of the heir-at-law it can signify little."

Fanny's pale cheek crimsoned as she answered through her tears, "His wife! Never!"

"Indeed!" was the only word with which Mr. Hardwick could reply, for at that moment they were called to listen to the reading of the will. It was very short. The landed property was entailed; there were legacies to a few old servants, and to Fanny Greyleigh was bequeathed the sum of fifty thousand pounds!

James Aimington almost started from his chair when he heard the words; yet he managed to listen with composure to the few remaining sentences.

"Gentlemen," said he, when the reading was concluded, "I beg to give you notice that I shall dispute this will. It is true the ink is scarcely dry, and the witnesses to the signature are all present; but my lamented cousin was not, for many weeks before his death, in a fit state to execute any such document."

Walter Hardwick trembled, for at a glance he saw, what before had not occurred to him, that, however admirable our laws, law and justice might not in this instance prove on the same side of the question.

"Take me home—to my *own* old home," murmured Fanny to a lady, a friend of the Aimingtons, who had passed the last few mournful weeks at the Hall; "take me home, dear lady."

"Nay, nay," was the reply; "I will stay with you here, or you shall go home with me. We know not yet," she continued with spirit, "that this gentleman has the power to injure you; and if the power be his, I cannot think he dare neglect his cousin's dying wishes, and leave destitute one who was dear to him as a child."

"This is not the time, madam, to speak of these things; though I may tell you that, partly suspecting the state of the case, I have already consulted my lawyers. There is no doubt of our setting aside the will, though probably I shall provide for this young person."

"Take me home—home," again murmured Fanny; and Walter Hardwick sighed out—"It is best."

Alas! the threat of the heir-at-law was carried out; the will was set aside. None but a stranger lawyer, and friendly doctor, could speak to the testator's soundness of mind. All other testimony was against it, and even the acknowledgment of the lawyer that Mr. Hardwick had suggested to the dying man that the legacy to Fanny should be smaller, was construed as proof that he feared its magnitude would draw attention to the legality of the will itself. It must be remembered, too, that the country medical attendant had not seen poor Mr. Aimington during the hour's "flicker of reason;"—and legal evidence overpowered a sense of justice.

Many were the friends of the dead, who, partly out of respect to their memory and partly from kindly feelings towards herself, invited Fanny to become, at least for a while, their guest; but firmly, though gratefully, she declined all such invitations. Her heart sickened at the thoughts of being again placed in a "false position;" yet it yearned for affection, and a *home*, and these she knew would be hers once more at the mill. But we have said before that Fanny Greyleigh saw clearly her duties; and fervently praying, as she did, to be able to fulfil them, it was no part of her plan to remain a burthen on her honest, industrious parents. No; she would heal her own sorrows and gladden their hearts by passing a few weeks or even months with them. And then she would go into a school as junior teacher, for the opportunity of improving herself; for though Fanny was in reality, from mere reading and conversation, better informed, more companionable, than many "accomplished" girls are found to be, her education had been so irregular, that a course of training was still necessary before she could become an efficient teacher. These were her plans (for a wretched pittance Mr. James Aimington offered as charity neither she nor her parents would accept); but what said Walter Hardwick?

Let us once more return in thought to the old mill, and the old farmhouse; not that they seem to have changed, or to have grown any older since we first spoke of them. It is the same large kitchen,

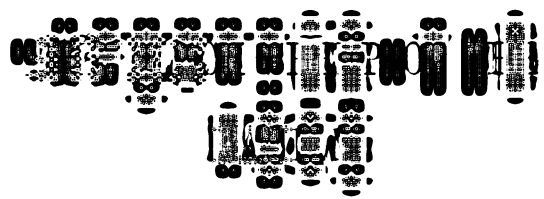
with the spacious chimney corner, and the oaken rafters (verily, one would believe with the self-same sides of bacon hanging therefrom), as that in which we first saw Fanny Greyleigh, the blue-eyed child of four years old, dressed in the russet frock, with the scarlet poppy stuck therein. The comely dame of five-and-thirty is now a care-worn woman of fifty; Greyleigh, the miller, looks what we call an old man. Punch has been dead for years, and his successor has not quite determined whether to be friends or not with the stranger, who, attired in the deepest but plainest mourning, sits listening with exemplary patience to the faulty reading of her youngest sister, the sometime baby of the cradle. All the family are attired in some show of mourning, but none is so decided as that of Fanny. How they listen to every word that falls from her lips—what an oracle they seem to think her! She begins to suspect she should have been more “spoilt” at home than ever she was by those who adopted her. And perhaps she is right—for people who are in a false position must be subject to many trials of temper. Amid all her sorrows, too, her heart has been gladdened by hearing that things have gone on better of late; the mortgage is nearly paid; and Johnny is doing well. Her energies are more than ever braced up to do her own “duty;” and yet she is rather wondering that for a whole week she has not heard from one whom she calls her kindest friend.

The latch is raised and Walter Hardwick enters. It is his first introduction at the farm; but as he steps across the sanded floor, he does not seem at all to observe that he is not treading on the softest carpet. He shakes the miller's hand warmly, and offers as friendly a greeting to his wife; he takes Fanny's hand last, but he ventures to hold it for a moment with a lingering pressure. How completely he has put them all at their ease!

We do not know half what he said that day, though we know pretty nearly for what purpose he came. It is enough that when a few months afterwards Fanny Greyleigh put off her mourning, it was to put on a bridal dress of simple white. And a very happy bride she was; given, at that quiet wedding, by her grey headed father, to the noble hearted Walter Hardwick.

"But if there had been no Walter Hardwick?" asks the reader; "and there are not many such men in the world. Nine out of ten men weigh carefully the environments of a girl before they choose her for a wife, calling their selfishness prudence — and seldom exercise the holy generosity of making even one self-sacrifice. What if there had been no Walter Hardwick?"

Why then I suppose the "pet and plaything," the Adopted Child, reared in luxury and elegance, would have become the drudging teacher of a school-room; the victim of Good Impulse unsupported by Principle!

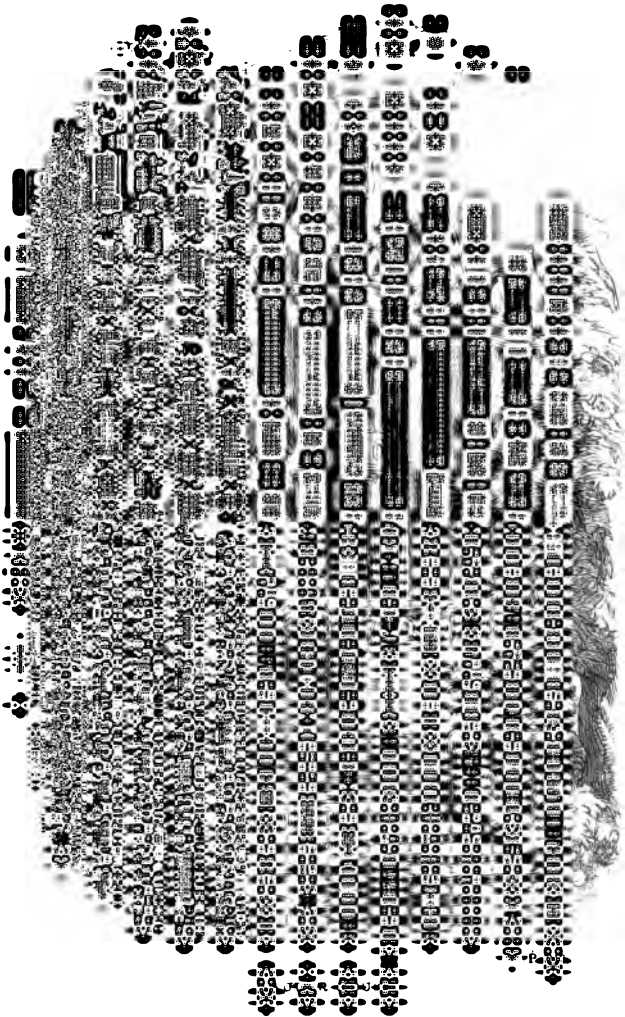


THE



ments, and the other is a large, dark, irregularly shaped object, possibly a piece of machinery or a large rock, with a complex, textured surface. It has several smaller, rounded protrusions and indentations, giving it a somewhat organic but mechanical appearance. The object is positioned horizontally across the upper middle of the page.





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1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

2. Next, gather relevant information and resources. This may include researching existing solutions, consulting experts, or collecting data.

3. Once the information is gathered, analyze it to identify the key factors and constraints. This step often involves breaking down the problem into smaller, more manageable parts.

4. Then, develop a plan or strategy to address the problem. This plan should outline the steps to be taken and the resources needed.

5. Finally, implement the plan and monitor the progress. This involves putting the plan into action and making adjustments as needed based on the results.

1. THE UNITED STATES
 2. OF AMERICA
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1. The first step is to identify the problem or goal. This involves understanding the current situation and what needs to be achieved.

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Margaret Ford, was in right of her mother an heiress ; and endowed by nature with no ordinary share of self-possession and self-esteem, the education bestowed on her with perpetual reference to her future position, had fostered and developed her innate qualities, until pride became her dominant characteristic. But it was a pride allied to excellent abilities and strict integrity. When she was eighteen, her father shocked and offended her—for from sheer force of character she was already the one to receive appeals, not offer them—by making a second marriage, choosing a wife who had youth and beauty, but was of poor and obscure family.

The young wife must have quailed at the haughty reception given by her step-daughter ; and yet it was a sort of haughtiness that had in it nothing tangible enough to justify resentment. Perhaps her father's marriage hastened a decision which she never found occasion to repent. From many suitors of high degree she chose an elderly Peninsular officer, of ancient Scottish lineage, who had won green laurels to cover his scars, had obtained more honour than gold, and had refused a baronetcy until it was accompanied by a military order of knighthood.

To do her justice, the heiress was neither avaricious nor purse-proud ; she made a handsome life-settlement on her father notwithstanding his *mésalliance* ; and notwithstanding her wealth, her youth, her beauty, and her own "sixteen quarterings," she thought herself ennobled in becoming the wife of

General Sir Andrew Macdonald. Perhaps it was only such a husband that she could ever honestly have promised to obey. But he had commanded men, and led them on to great deeds; and, without a sacrifice, she could bend her spirit to his. Had she been a vain woman, she would doubtless have proved a heedless, selfish, self-willed wife, striving to rule her middle-aged lord; but she was a proud one, and a part of her pride was to be meek, loving, gentle, and obedient to him. They were admirably mated, and the few years of their wedded life were supremely happy.

Meanwhile two daughters were born to her father, and she herself became the mother of an only son.

Years passed on; and in life's kaleidoscope changes death was busy. First Sir Andrew, whose constitution had never thoroughly recovered the trials of military service, passed to the tomb, leaving his young wife sole guardian of their son. I do not pause to tell of the widow's grief. Lady Macdonald had deep affections beneath her pride, though they were less demonstrative in gladness than capable of being probed by pain. Next faded and died her father's wife; and Mr. Ford, now an old man, did not long survive the breaking up of his domestic life; the shadow that fell where a cheerful presence had been seemed always beckoning him to follow. Mary Ford was fifteen and Hester thirteen when they were orphaned—thrown on the charity of their wealthy half-sister. Lady Macdonald was generous

as well as just; and when people do a kindness, it is strange indeed if they must not do it in their own way. And yet the heart may rebel at what the reason approves!

Old enough to be their mother she took at once the tone of authority as well as of protection; but never knew how hard to their young natures was the discipline she enforced. Idolised by their parents, caressed, indulged by them almost to folly, they had been what are called spoiled children; but I believe girls will stand a very great deal of the sort of spoiling they had experienced without much detriment. But now, and even in the early days of their heart-sorrow, were to be assumed the starched manners, and endured the hard study beneath a rigid governess of fifty, whose sensibility had been dried up by the chill atmosphere of her profession, which after thirty years had left her the skilled teacher of facts, and nothing more. Her mental world must have been a vast tomb, where the dry bones of knowledge stalked with a sort of galvanic life. Cold companion; stern teacher for children who were growing fast into true women, pining for tenderness, though they knew not how to name their want!

Mary at seventeen eloped with an old playmate, hardly three years her senior; and, through long years unforgiven, was looked on as "The Black Sheep of the Family." Hester, not without a history, was in 184— the maiden lady of a certain age.

The young Sir Andrew was married at twenty

to a wife of his mother's choosing. He happened to like the young lady very well, and the year of their married life was a peaceful one. She died in presenting him with a daughter; and he, who notwithstanding his pedigree was but an ordinary specimen of the country gentleman, was killed at three-and-twenty by an accident while deer-stalking.

Again was Lady Macdonald left the guardian of a child—the little Agnes.



CHAPTER II.

THE snow lay deep, but the frost bound it together, and made for the time being a firm pavement of its treacherous masses. A little more wind, and the weather would have been Siberian; as it was, the air seemed at rest and the bare boughs were motionless, save when a famishing bird swayed some light twig. The day was light for Christmas time in England, although the sun had not once peeped from its whitish hood of clouds. In short it was a true winter's day.

Hester Ford, well clad in velvet and fur, was evidently prepared for walking or riding, yet lingered, leaning beside the tall chimney-piece in the chintz drawing-room, as if she had still something to say to her sister. A large Indian screen was drawn in a semicircle towards the fire, and seemed to por-

tion off a lesser chamber within the room. Lady Macdonald, on the opposite side of the fire, was plying her needle—thanks to her spectacles—making up coarse flannel for poor people. Her words, fortunately, led to the topic which her companion at once hesitated, yet longed, to approach.

“My dear!” she exclaimed good-humouredly, “you were very idle yesterday, and now you are leaving me your share of hemming and sewing to complete.”

When in her most affable mood Lady Macdonald always called her younger sister “my dear.”

“I plead guilty,” replied Hester; “but, sister, some other time I will make up for my negligence, and work most diligently for you. To-day, O Margaret! let me tell you something that has happened.”

A shade of displeasure passed over the elder lady’s countenance, and she replied in an altered tone, yet without looking up from her employment—“There is but one subject, I believe, between us which ever needs a croaking note of preparation; and I have observed you are fond of introducing it at Christmas time.”

“It is true; because the season, with all its joy and holiness, is a sad anniversary; because it vividly recalls the fault of an inexperienced girl; and because the outcast herself has more than once chosen it for her vain attempts at reconciliation.”

“I am to understand, then, that you are in corre-

spondence with your sister," returned Lady Macdonald, still stitching on in her orderly manner. "You know that my wish is never to hear her name; but if a stranger sent me a message, I must listen to it. Does she want money?" and as she spoke she glanced at a cheque-book which chanced to lie open on the table.

"No! the early trials, the bitter sorrows of that worst poverty—the poverty of the well-born and well-bred—are over; her husband's talents appear to be duly recognised; fame brings gold in its train, and poor Mary feels that only your forgiveness is necessary to her happiness."

"She must have learned by this time to do very well without it; and the triumph of her present prosperity cannot incline her very much to repentance."

"It may be, sister, that she looks upon her sorrows and disappointments—and they have been many—as sufficient punishment for her error; but it is since she has seen her own daughters growing towards womanhood that she has fully recognised the wrong she did you, has thoroughly comprehended your generosity, and the earnest manner in which you strove to perform a mother's part to both of us."

"I endeavoured to do what I thought right, but I have never attached any particular merit to the performance of a duty."

"I know that full well. Yet, Margaret, if you

could make allowances for weaker natures than your own—for temptation—youth. Poor Mary! it is only reconciliation that she asks—if——”

“I cannot,” said Lady Macdonald, not quite unmoved, though she spoke without resting from her work. “Yet do not fancy that I am dragging the burthen of an animosity with me towards the grave. I would not injure her, and perhaps, under other circumstances, it might have been different. I cannot tell—but I could not look little Agnes in the face if I had forgiven my sister her fault. I wonder at you, Hester, interceding—you who, in the hour of your girlish temptation, behaved so differently.”

“Life is a strange riddle,” said Hester, with evident bitterness—the tears standing in her still fine eyes. “I sometimes think that none of us are born to happiness or content. If I tell you what I never yet have owned—if I aver that, with all your generosity, the ease, luxury, affluence I have enjoyed, there have been hours when I have repented of that which you esteem my chief merit—when I would have given every joy on earth to recal the true heart I banished—if——”

“Hush, hush!” said Lady Macdonald, dropping her work at last, and pressing her hands to her ears, as if to crush out the sound; “let me not hear such words.”

“Forgive—forget—them!” exclaimed Hester, with quick remorse; “they were words of folly and insanity, wrung from my distress. My heart aches

for poor Mary's disappointment, and again must I be the instrument of it."

"You are writing to your sister, then, I presume?"

"I am going to see her, Margaret—to meet her by appointment at D——. She tells me she has something urgent to communicate; but to relieve any anxiety such words might occasion, she hints that she has no new or personal distress to relate; and that, on the contrary, her husband is prospering at last beyond their highest ambition. Possibly you saw his knighthood mentioned in the newspapers," added Hester, with some hesitation.

"I did. A painter of pictures knighted!" And Lady Macdonald shrugged her shoulders with contemptuous pity for the degeneracy of the age: after a moment she continued, "When are you going? D—— is six miles distant. Have you ordered the carriage?"

"I have—and I have not. I begged that the horses might be put to, but not brought round without further orders."

"Why was this, Hester? You ought to know that I am always best pleased when I see that you act without control. You know that you are always mistress of one carriage; this was part of my bond when you gave up Mr. Gerald Wentmore, and I always wish to pay my debts."

"Yet," said Hester, "I could not take your carriage on such a mission without your sanction. If ——"

"Go, go—I wish to avoid scenes!" and Lady Macdonald rang the bell as she spoke.

In the momentary silence which ensued, the door behind the screen certainly opened and closed; then opened again, so that it was another minute before the servant appeared.

"The carriage for Miss Ford directly," said Lady Macdonald, in her stateliest tone.

"Margaret!" sobbed Hester, stretching out both her hands, and taking one of her sister's between her own, where passively it rested—"Margaret, kiss me before I go; I love you better—I am more grateful than you think."

Lady Macdonald stooped her tall figure to kiss her sister's cheek, and something like a vital movement crept through the passive hand, and responded to Hester's pressure.



CHAPTER III.

IF not precisely the "*best inn's best room*," it was, at all events, a comfortable apartment in which the long-separated sisters met, making allowance, of course, for that certain baldness and bareness, and unhome look, from which we doubt much if there is an hotel in Europe that is thoroughly free. Perhaps a long residence in one may warm

and shapen the place into a home fashion; but generally a mental shivering fit has to be encountered at the threshold. However, Lady Shafton—lady in right of her husband, Sir William's, knight-hood—had drawn the sofa and an easy chair near the blazing fire, had spied and dragged from its dark corner a faded footstool, had arranged the blinds to the pleasantest light, and had ordered a delicate well-chosen luncheon to be ready at the appointed hour. A poet is said to be "born," not "made," and so, I am sure, is a hostess, who, to charm by her spiriting, must have a large warm heart, a ready wit, and a thoughtful and thoroughly unselfish nature. Lady Shafton was a born hostess. In her husband's struggling days, she had made the home of poverty gracious, and frugal fare sometimes a banquet to their few but sincere friends, by the genial welcome she so naturally displayed: in dawning prosperity, her gift had but developed with opportunity; and now, even in her hired apartment, it was her nature to make glad preparation for the most welcome of guests. She saw the carriage from the window, and recognised her sister's unchanged liveries; but the wearers were strange to her—Lady Macdonald not being remarkable for keeping her servants for any very lengthened term.

Tearful was the meeting, and for a time nearly speechless. The self-appointed hostess drew Hester to the easy chair—she loosened her bonnet, she drew

off her mantle, she kissed her twenty times, and then their tears dried away into smiles and gladness; and, after a little while, they sat hand in hand, and discoursed, without ecstasies, like rational creatures.

Hester's last visit to her sister had been, years before, in obscure London lodgings; but there was something that legibly enough marked the difference between the then and now. In the first place, Lady Shafton was much better dressed than Hester had ever seen her; and dress makes more difference to looks than people think they *ought* to allow—very especially after what some one calls “the sharp corner of thirty-five” is turned. Then she was a little, just a little stouter; and that fact also was an advantage to her *seconde jeunesse*. Certain lines of care, which had given a half-sad, half-thoughtful expression to her countenance, seemed almost to have passed away, and the fine eye—with the Fords a family feature, and which lenient time generally touches the last—seemed more radiant than ever.

“How good of you to come here!” exclaimed Hester, after half-an-hour's chat had exhausted the immediate topic of Lady Macdonald's obduracy, “and to come alone this long way.”

“Nay, Edward, your godson, is my escort. He could not come to D—— without seeing the cathedral, but he will be back to luncheon. You will not know him, I expect—five feet ten and a half, and barely nineteen; quite manly enough to take care of his little mamma, as he very impertinently calls me.”

"How happy your children must be!" mused Hester, with a smile, and her musing, after a moment, was spoken.

"I hope they are. People tell me they are spoilt, and I know what is meant by that misapplied word; but I call children more 'spoilt' when they are made false and frightened by severity than ever they were by kindness. However, this reminds me that I want to catechise you before Edward returns, and before I tell you what circumstances induced me to journey seventy miles this mid-winter weather, besides the pleasure and delight of meeting you."

"Catechise me?" asked Hester, with evident surprise.

"Yes; concerning our sister's grand daughter, our grand niece, Agnes Macdonald, or rather of one who is about her;—tell me of her governess, what is she like?"

"Like!—like no one I could name. But she is a clever, accomplished woman; a German by birth, she says, though I sometimes doubt it,—speaking three or four languages; and although, to own the truth, she and I have never been great friends, she has always kept herself in high favour with Margaret."

"How and why do you think?"

"I hardly like to say it, yet I fear partly by a system of the most delicate and adroit flattery, that never betrays itself into coarse and palpable adulation; and partly because Margaret thinks it so

great a privilege to have a lady of ancient lineage about Agnes."

"What does she call herself!"

"The Baroness Von Bernheim, belonging to the family of Hesse something, and who for a salary of two hundred a year, and 'high consideration,' condescends to her situation. Her father, who had a string of titles, was colonel, she says, among the Black Brunswickers at Waterloo, and you know that enmity to Napoleon is always a key to Margaret's sympathies."

Lady Shafton nodded her head twice or thrice with a grave smile, as if confirmed in her opinion, whatever that might be; and drawing a memorandum-book from her pocket, she referred to it, continuing—"Now tell me her probable age and personal appearance."

"She does not look above thirty, but if her father fell at Waterloo, she must be considerably more. She is of the medium height, tolerably well looking, yet rather plebeian, nevertheless, if one dare say it of so grand a lady."

"It is generally a powerful motive which induces a woman to add half-a-dozen years to her apparent age," said Lady Shafton.

"My dearest Mary, what can you mean?"

"That my notes say—aged twenty-nine."

"You terrify me, dear Mary, and fill my mind with vague suspicions!"

"One more question. Has she white well-

shaped hands, or anything remarkable about them?"

"Certainly a coarse hand; besides, she has partly lost the use of her left hand from an accident when a child, which prevents her from playing on any instrument, although she professes to understand music and teach it."

"Conclusive," exclaimed Lady Shafton, putting the note-book into her sister's hand. "The description, though gathered piecemeal, is sufficiently authentic. Her hand was disabled a few years ago by a stab received in a quarrel and scuffle among her confederates, swindlers and gamblers. She is an arch impostor, no more a Baroness than you or I; clever she may be, though hardly accomplished, for she passed some years of her life as a waiting-maid, travelling with her mistress, and so, perhaps, improved her knowledge of languages. How could Margaret have been the dupe of such a person?"

"Easily," replied Hester; "for *I* never suspected such a revelation as this. And I do visit occasionally—do correspond with a few friends—do know something of the world beyond the gates of Lauder House. Not so Lady Macdonald, who lives only in the memory of her own past life, and in the future of her darling Agnes. She may readily have been imposed on by forged credentials."

"Tell me what sort of a girl is Agnes?"

"Affectionate and tender-hearted, and, I fear, even more impulsive than we were in our girlish

days, though awed into seeming coldness and apathy in her grandmother's presence. With excellent abilities, and a fair share of beauty, she ought to realise all Margaret's hopes. But there is something dreadful in this woman having been her teacher—her associate for six months; and she is so attached to 'her dear Baroness'—her 'darling governess,' as I hear her called sometimes. But, Mary, how came you to know such a history?"

"Briefly thus:—Painters have strange experiences. A splendidly handsome but most worthless young man has sat as model to my husband for more than one of his pictures. Willy wanted him again latterly—made inquiries at his residence—found a substitute in one of his some-time associates, who, in pique at fancied neglect, babbled about him and his concerns, mentioning his sister, who was governess to a youthful heiress, and who had gained such influence with the grandmother that she ruled the family—even hinting that there were plots weaving for him to marry the pupil. This idea is, of course, too ridiculous; but there were so many circumstances that coincided with those of Margaret and her grand-daughter, that I decided on seeing you without delay. Our sister may never relent and forgive my early fault; but it will ever be to me a sweet consolation to have done her this service." As Lady Shafton spoke, her voice trembled with emotion; but she proceeded—"If, Hester, it will be painful to her to be obliged by me, spare her the

humiliation; only give her notice of the impostor. Let her question this worthless woman, and dismiss her. I have two dear daughters of my own, and I could not rest with the thought of the poor orphaned, though to me unknown, Agnes being exposed to a vile woman's machinations. But here comes Edward," she continued, struggling with her feelings. "Though I wished to discuss this subject with you alone, he is quite cognisant of it."

Edward Shafton had been the last twelvemonths at one of the universities, or probably his father would not have sought beyond his own roof for a youthful model. Tall and finely formed, graceful with a natural grace, improved by good breeding, but which is in itself an expression of the mind; with deep blue eyes, that half his friends thought black; rich, soft, dark hair, and what one instinctively calls "patrician" features, he was really more of a pattern hero than I like by choice to portray.

"And this is Aunt Hester!" said he, in a rich, full voice, that had frankness and feeling in every tone; and loosening his great coat, and throwing down his hat and stick as he spoke. "Oh, how little changed since I sat on your knee, while you told me stories! Won't you give me as hearty kisses now as you did years ago?" he continued, smiling and stooping to salute her; and then, as both ladies were standing on the hearth-rug, he very quietly passed an arm round the waist of each, with a gesture that had something of protection amid its boyish wilful-

ness. And thus they chatted for a full ten minutes about the beauties of the cathedral, and the false Baroness, and on some other topics, till the luncheon-dinner was served, Edward saying incidentally, "Mamma, dear, the express train we must go by leaves at six o'clock."

"Hester, you will stay with us to the last!" exclaimed Lady Shafton, entreatingly.

"Oh, certainly!" And so she did.

When Hester Ford returned to Lauder House, she saw the women-servants in tears—the men in strange confusion; and, making her way to her sister's side, with wild, blind fear, found Lady Macdonald in a stony agony.

There stood the matron in the middle of the room, with her cap fallen off, and her long grey hair streaming over her shoulders. Her eyes seemed glazed; her face was ashy pale; her lips moved, but uttered no sound; and when Hester rushed to her side a gurgling noise alone betrayed her effort to speak, as she pointed, with a stiffened finger, to an open letter on the ground.

The writing was in the girlish hand of Agnes, and announced that she had fled!

CHAPTER IV.

NOTWITHSTANDING the general good management of our railways, there is always more or less helter-skelter when one starts from a station instead of a terminus. It is no use being told, as the train approaches, that there is no hurry; the engine puffing off its steam when it stops as if every moment's delay were positive torture to its iron frame, says obstinately the contrary; and right few passengers are lethargic enough to take their seats in a perfectly calm and leisurely manner. Lady Shafton and her son, however, being free from the traveller's trouble, luggage, were a little less hurried than the general throng which crowded the platform at D—, and took time to peep into two or three carriages before they made their selection. The one into which at last they stepped would have been wholly unoccupied, save that a heap of travelling apparel, surmounted by a travelling cap, was cozily gathered in one of the corner seats, and suggested that probably a human being was entombed beneath that mountain of broad cloth. Hardly were they seated when the remaining vacant places were appropriated by two ladies and a young man.

Off dashed the train, and soon away from the

glare of the station's gas-lights, the twinkle of the little lamp in the roof of the carriage was duly estimated. Lady Shafton looked about her, and perceived that the good-natured face of a man about forty years of age peered from beneath the travelling cap, and then turning to the newcomers, remarked that the younger lady, who was evidently an object of great solicitude to her companions, kept her veil down, although its folds were not thick enough to conceal that she was stirred by some strong emotion. More than once her handkerchief was raised to her eyes, and Lady Shafton felt certain that she was weeping. Had there been a more ordinary demeanour about her fellow-travellers, they would assuredly only have attracted a momentary attention from one whose mind was occupied by the events of the day, and who was more inclined to muse silently than anything else; but the half-suppressed sobs from the young girl at her side broke painfully on her reverie, and she felt interested half against her will.

Nor was Edward Shafton unobservant of their companions: a truth which his mother, whose sympathy found a meaning in his every glance and movement, very soon perceived. Presently he took a card from his pocket, and writing a few words thereon with a pencil, handed it to Lady Shafton. She read as follows:—

“There can be no doubt about *him*. Surely you recognise my father's ‘Craven Knight’ and ‘Lucifer Expelled.’ But who are *they*? Observe what double

duty my neighbour makes her right hand do. And who can the young lady be, if not my cousin Agnes? Be calm, dearest little mamma, whatever you may suspect or we discover. He does not remember me the least, I am sure, and very likely he never saw you."

There was a long look exchanged between mother and son, a look which was hardly less expressive to each other than words might have been; though none of their companions at all divined the tremor, the icy chill, and the fever flush which passed alternately through Lady Shafton's frame, before she was able to recover her firmness and presence of mind. Yet a world of counsel, comfort, help, protection came to her on the wings of those three words, "dearest little mamma!" What need she fear, what could she not dare, with her brave boy beside her? Meanwhile Edward himself had turned up the collar of his great-coat, and buried his chin therein, bethinking himself that it were wise not to tempt recognition just at present, though he had sprung up in two years from the boy to the man.

At the first plausible opportunity Lady Shafton offered her vinaigrette to the young lady, a civility which was accepted, and led the way—one personage of the party being so very ready—to general conversation.

It has often been remarked that rogues, in the exercise of their vocation, generally exhibit more ingenuity, and perform more arduous tasks, than might

have been necessary in pursuing a straightforward honest career; in like manner the falsehoods and subterfuges of two of the travellers exhibited more invention in half an hour, than good, quiet people might have needed in a lifetime. The pretended Baroness—for it is best to sweep away our thin cloud of mystery, and acknowledge that Lady Shafton's and her son's suspicions were correct—related how her young friend was in great distress of mind, being sent for to a near and dear relative, who was at the point of death; while the handsome, mustachoe'd, but not quite gentlemanly-looking young man, echoed her words, and added some insufferable slip-slop compliment about their young companion's tender heart and feeling nature.

It was at this moment that the young girl raised her veil, perhaps inadvertently, perhaps because some spring of her nature compelled her to face, not cower beneath, the hail of falsehood that was showered around her. Lady Shafton saw the "Ford eye," as it flashed from the pale, suffering face of Agnes Macdonald, as if in resentment of her own weakness, that had brought upon her these insults; but Lady Shafton had too much at stake to be hasty or premature in the *eclaircissement*.

"Such journeys," she observed, as if in credence of the woman's words, "leave an indelible impression on the mind. Strange to say, this road is full of distressing associations to myself; for though the circumstances which occasioned them occurred before

the railroad was formed, the names of places are unchanged, and more than one station to-night has brought back a host of recollections."

The "Baroness," who no doubt expected a story savouring of funeral plumes and a death-bed summons, expressed herself anxious on the subject, and Lady Shafton continued.

"Twenty years ago, a young girl, hardly older, I should think, than this young lady, fled from the neighbourhood of D——; fled from her home, from the protection of her nearest relative, to wed without the consent of one to whom she owed duty and gratitude."

"And perhaps the marriage turned out very happily," answered the other in a quick tone. "Only to-day I heard an old maid regretting that she had not run off with her lover."

"The marriage to which I allude," continued Lady Shafton, "cannot be said to have turned out ill, because the one fault of a life is something different from general depravity, and because the young lover was the soul of truth and honour, and because the love of both was genuine, young heart love; and yet I know that the long trials of poverty and disappointed ambition perilled this love, jeopardised it from time to time to the very brink of extinction, as a lamp dwindles for need of oil. Even in their latter happier days, when love has burned brightly, there has ever sat a weight of remorse at that girl's heart;—remorse for kindness and pro-

tection ill requited—remorse for her unmaidenly act—remorse that sometimes took a phantom shape, and seemed to stand before her young daughters, and tell her she could be no guide and teacher to them. I knew that girl—I know that wife intimately; her flight took place in the Christmas week. You cannot wonder that the season and the place recalled it.”

The gentleman in the travelling cap had roused himself to listen to this story; but they to whom it was addressed would have interrupted it had they known how, without betraying themselves. At last the “Baroness” observed,—“Poverty is a sad thing under any circumstances; and perhaps if your friend had inherited a fortune, her troubles would have been fewer.”

“Nay, in one sense, her want of fortune was a blessing. It convinced her, at least, that her lover’s vows were sincere, that it was herself he loved. Now, I hold that an heiress, if endowed with common sense, must distrust any lover who would urge her to a clandestine step, even to the secret encouragement of his addresses or an implied engagement.”

It was clear that the “Baroness” had not bettered her position, especially as poor Agnes shook with emotion, and the vinaigrette was again in request. The two confederates spoke curtly and quickly a few words in what seemed a patois of French; and Lady Shafton gathered that they were

debating if they should quit the carriage at the next opportunity ; but finally, as they would reach London now in half an hour, it was agreed they should go on.

The last station passed, the last pause before the final one, and the train was again in rapid motion. The time for action was come, and, with a heart beating so fast and thick she seemed to hear it, Lady Shafton turned to the silent gentleman in the corner and spoke thus :—

“ If, sir, you are made witness to a painful scene, pardon me ; but as you may be a father or a brother, I implore you stand by the right.” Then, turning quickly to the half-fainting girl, she passed an arm round her waist, and speaking rapidly, said :—

“ Agnes Macdonald, dear girl, poor victim, be saved while you may. I am your Aunt Mary ; let me prove my identity, see the ring my sister Hester has worn for years ; you must know it : we exchanged rings to-day, and here is a letter in her hand-writing received by me yesterday. Let me rescue you from these dreadful people who are plotting your destruction. Nay, touch her not,”—for the woman had seized Agnes by the arm, and in what very nearly approached a scuffle, had revealed the hideously maimed hand—“ touch her not. I know your history, even to the history of that hand. Be prudent, or I give you into the charge of the police.”

The pretended “ Baroness ” quailed for a moment ;

but she was too perfect in her part to be even now wholly at fault ; and so she poured forth a string of invectives on Lady Shafton, and of appeals to Agnes, Meanwhile the brother seized the hand of their dupe, and trying daringly to draw her towards him, uttered protestations that it would seem a pollution of love and truth to repeat. This was beyond the endurance of Edward, who naturally athletic, seemed from the excitement of the moment to have acquired additional strength, so that he untwisted the fingers which clasped the girl's wrist as if they belonged to a child, instead of to a man of five-and-twenty. The baffled fortune-hunter was in truth quite discomfited ; for his sister, probably disapproving of his harangue, tried to stop it more than once with a sharp "*tais-toi*."

What wells of shame, remorse, humbled pride, and wounded affection were opened in the heart of poor Agnes, no tongue, no pen can tell ; but once, when amid tears and sobs, she hesitated between the new true friend and the false but fondly-loved teacher, a light broke upon her mind which showed at least one proved deception.

"Oh, Baroness !" she exclaimed with bitter emotion, "now that you are angry, how well you speak English !"

For the first time during the whole scene, the wretched woman blushed, while she bit her lip till the blood almost started.

Hitherto the gentleman in the corner had been a

silent though not unmoved listener; now his voice was heard—

"It is a singular, a most remarkable coincidence," he observed, "but I happen to have some knowledge of this lady's family, and shall certainly consider myself justified in assisting her to rescue her niece from the control of strangers. I recommend you," he continued, addressing the guilty pair, "to give up the young lady quietly. I have heard quite enough to comprehend your aim and purpose, and can moreover perceive, that your youthful victim is at length herself undeceived. Be advised, and so avoid worse consequences."

Meanwhile Agnes leaned back with closed eyes, and apparently half-fainting. Lady Shafton whispered in her ear, "You will go with me?" and the response was a barely audible "Yes."

But the pretended Baroness heard it, and desperate with rage and foiled desires, made one last attempt to recover her advantage. Every phrase of persuasion she summoned to her aid, and among other remarks, again alluded to Hester's words.

"Remember what I heard your aunt say only this morning when I was passing through the drawing-room, that she repented having given up her lover to please Lady Macdonald, and will not you repent too—you who would have had the glory of raising a nobleman to fortune."

"False—false—false!" exclaimed Lady Shafton. "You forget that we know you."

But now the train was slackening speed, and in another minute the cry of "Tickets, tickets!" broke with its plain reality upon the excitement of the scene. "You had better go," said the stranger gentleman, once more addressing the pair. And, with a fulsome attempt at leave-taking of Agnes, they were, after all, the first to leave the train.

"Pardon me," said the stranger, addressing Lady Shafton, who was supporting the drooping Agnes as a mother would a suffering child; "pardon the question, madam; but have you any one in attendance?"

"No; but we shall readily procure a conveyance."

"I expect my carriage to be waiting; oblige me by using it. You may rely on my servants, whereas a hired driver might be followed and questioned."

"How kind, how thoughtful!" said Lady Shafton. "Let me know to whom we are indebted."

"My name is ——. I will give you my card, or do myself the pleasure of calling to inquire after you in a day or two. James," he continued, addressing his coachman, in a low voice—for the carriage was quickly found—"James, I shall walk home; but you will drive these friends of mine to Wimpole Street, and drive fast. Take care you are not followed, and answer no questions that may be asked you."

Let me draw a veil over the confession of poor Agnes, as she sobbed out the history of her fault to

Lady Shafton. Almost as ignorant of the world as a cloistered nun might be, and yet possessed of warm affections and an imaginative romantic nature, the artful governess had worked on this temperament partly by her conversation, and partly by the books she had placed before her. She had painted in flaming colours the pleasures of society and of the gay world, and had taken every occasion of contrasting them with the dull life at Lauder House, and the severe discipline established by Lady Macdonald. Then, choosing her opportunity, the handsome brother—no one having an idea of the relationship—had been introduced, with Lady Macdonald's concurrence, as a teacher of the guitar; but only to Agnes was it told that he was a nobleman in disguise, who, for love of her, had devised this subterfuge. The innocent credulity of youth never doubted; she was led astray by her she had been instructed to trust and obey; and finally, by a plot within a plot, she was induced to write—merely as a rough copy, she was told—a letter to Lady Macdonald, declaring her attachment and intentions, only to be used in case of necessity. Then came the artfully-planned but seemingly accidental opportunity, and the moment of trust so cruelly betrayed.

Surely there is more pity to be felt for the poor girl than wonder that she fell into the snare!

CHAPTER V.

WE left Hester Ford in the first moment of her astonishment and distress, and it was long before she could rouse Lady Macdonald from the dull agony in which she found her to a free burst of tears; yet it came at last, and brought something of relief. Never had Hester seen her haughty sister so moved; and perhaps, in her heart, she had not believed her capable of such suffering as she witnessed. The flight of Agnes and her governess had only just been discovered; no steps to pursue them had yet been taken; and it was clear that action and direction remained for Hester. For the first time in her life the proud, self-sustained Lady Macdonald, prostrated by her anguish, appealed and yielded to her younger sister.

No doubt Hester felt somewhat calmer and more hopeful than she might otherwise have done, from having a clue, vague as it was, to the fugitives; and, moreover, she had a strange dim presentiment that her sister Mary would prove all-powerful to avert the dreaded calamity of a disgraceful marriage—that event which had been spoken of only a few hours before as “too ridiculous.” Her first thought was of the electric telegraph, but her watch told her it

was too late; she had loitered at D——, making some purchases, and the express train would be due in London before a message to stop the fugitives could be forwarded. Strange, indeed, if they should have journeyed by it, bearing, as it did the unknown relatives. Finally, she decided on sending the butler—a trusty servant—by special train to London, with a letter to Lady Shafton, communicating the frightful intelligence, and urging her, through the worthless woman's vile associates to whom she had alluded, to track the poor lost child. Messengers were sent also in other directions, and Lady Macdonald's lawyer summoned; and now the night was advancing.

What a night it was! Lady Macdonald refused even to seek sleep, and alternately paced the room, wringing her hands, as she by turns reproached Agnes and blamed herself, or fell exhausted by grief into her chair. All Hester's energies were taxed in her office of consoler, or she might have wept even more bitterly than she did for the fate and conduct of her young relative. The servants had been ordered to rest, all but a man who drowsed by the hall fire; and now it must have been two o'clock in the morning. Everything was still out of doors; though once when Hester opened a shutter to look at the night, she saw that fresh snow was falling in large feathery flakes. Suddenly there was a noise of wheels, as of some open light conveyance, so near that the lodge-gates must have been passed, and

in another minute was heard a loud peal at the bell.

The sleepy servant roused himself to unbar the door, and the sisters listened, mute and almost breathless.

"Let me see Miss Ford instantly," said the stranger. "I am the bearer of good news." And Hester recognised the voice of Edward Shafton. She sprang to his side; six words apprised her that Agnes was saved; she led him to Lady Macdonald, told the happy truth in broken ejaculations, and there, with the snow-flakes dripping from his garments, but looking unwearied by travel, the spirit of the glad tidings lighting up his handsome countenance, stood the son of the despised sister, for the first time beneath that roof.

He told his story simply and distinctly, yet without claiming for his mother the merit which Lady Macdonald's heart loudly proclaimed was her due.

"Knowing but too well," he continued, "that every hour's delay must be a year of suffering to Lady Macdonald, and as I was a witness to the whole transaction, both my father and mother at once decided that I should bring the intelligence by a special train. Be assured, dear madam, that your grand-daughter is safe, save that her young heart seems almost broken by remorse for the part she has played. But my mother and sisters are the fondest of nurses—if I could only hope to mediate——"

"Yes, yes, she must come back," interrupted Lady Macdonald. "I will be gentle with her—

tender. I will not reproach. Oh, Agnes, I never knew till now how dear you were!" and again subdued by her feelings, she leaned her head on the table and wept bitterly.

All this time Edward had been standing, with a small table and two wax candles, which feebly lighted the large room, between him and Lady Macdonald; but now it was that Hester offered to take his hat from his hand, and motioned him to be seated. Yet, though he acknowledged, he did not accept the courtesy. Lady Macdonald saw the gesture of each, and understood what was passing in their minds.

She calmed herself for a moment, rose from her seat, and laying her hand on Edward's arm, looked at him mournfully.

"Young man," she exclaimed, "are you so hard upon me? Can you only think of my past unkindness, and so deem yourself an unwelcome guest? Do you not know what I owe your mother?—ah, your face is like hers, and I feel poor Mary will forgive me yet. Everything is so different from what I thought—you are a gentleman—I could have been proud of you for my own son." Her voice was choked with fresh-coming tears, her frame trembled, and Edward in another minute found himself supporting the haughty lady who had been to him for years the imagined type of pride and coldness,—found himself soothing and solacing her, and finally seated by her side, his hand clasped in hers. That

gesture which had reminded her that he felt himself the son of the outcast had probed her to the quick.

Next came hospitable thoughts, and the sleepy footman was once more roused to furnish forth the best viands from the larder. Truth to tell, the refreshment was very acceptable to the guest, whose youthful frame began at last to feel the effects of fatigue and excitement.

Suddenly, a new paroxysm of grief seized Lady Macdonald. Hitherto her absorbing sorrow had seemed only to control the Present; now she perceived how its dark shadow stretched far into the Future.

"My poor Agnes!" she exclaimed. "Lost, unhappy child! What man, such as I would give you to, will now take you for his wife, with the dark stain of an attempted elopement upon you?"

"Think not of this," said Hester, soothingly; "the most tangled threads of life weave themselves free at last. Let us for the present only rejoice that the poor child has escaped from the worst consequences of so deep a plot."

"But I cannot help thinking of the future," resumed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of bitterness, and with increasing emphasis. "Since my son's death, the one dream, the one hope of my life has been to see Agnes suitably wed, to know that my husband's name and honours would be revered by his descendants, to believe that our line would yet show great men and virtuous women. And now—oh! may God forgive me for clinging thus to the

creature He gave me, and to the hopes of this world!" And again, as if rent by anguish, she sank her head upon her hands.

Edward Shafton was deeply moved. Truly the events of the last few hours had taught him lessons of life which he might have been long in learning, and by a better teaching, too, than men—licensed, it would seem rather to learn evil than good—often know. He spoke from his heart when he said—

"Think not men are so hard and unforgiving. I can fancy a man of purest life, feeling pity and sympathy for such a fault, committed at such an age. Love, too, is ever generous and self-devoting. I have witnessed her sufferings, I am certain of her remorse, and I have seen the specious wretches who betrayed her, and know that her innocence was no match for their villany."

"You—you—but no other man in the world!" exclaimed Lady Macdonald, wringing her hands; and still, at intervals, she repeated, "You—you—but no other!"

CHAPTER VI.

THOROUGH gossips—those chattering magpies or society, who are perpetually talking about persons, not things—it is to be feared abound more or less in every circle; but, perhaps, it is part of the beautiful

system of compensation which prevails in the world, that such people are never content with the morsel of truth simply as they receive it. They are for ever adding to, and taking from a fact; guessing and conjecturing; building up mighty fabrics on false foundations, and propping these falling edifices with new inventions, until, in the hurly-burly, the original particle of truth often glides out of sight. Thus was it, and in many respects most fortunately so, with the saddest episode in the life of Agnes.

The attempted elopement coinciding with the reconciliation of the estranged sisters, the evil was merged in the good by the voice of rumour. After two or three preposterous versions had had their day, the tale quietly settled down that Agnes Macdonald, impelled by a generous and romantic feeling, had so strongly urged her grandmother to receive Lady Shafton, that high words had ensued, and that she had thereupon sought protection from her aunt. Indeed, one of the gossips of D—— (a male gossip, too,) speaks on the subject still with quite positive knowledge.

"I will tell you how I know it," he says frequently to his intimates. "I met Mr. Peters, the butler, not three days after it all happened, and I asked him boldly if it were true that he was sent after Miss Macdonald to London, and he said, 'Why, not exactly. I was sent with a letter to Lady Shafton. Bless you, first of all we thought Miss Agnes had run away to get married, but that wasn't it; for

when I got up to the London house, there were the whole family retired to roost as if nothing had happened. Only my knocking woke them, and her leddyship, that's the new-made Lady Shafton, promised I should see Miss Agnes, and, after a little while, brought her down in a morning-wrapper to the parlour, and then she told me how she had sent her son to Lauder House, to assure Lady Macdonald that her grand-daughter was safe, and to explain how it happened that she had taken charge of Miss Agnes all the way from D——.' Now, putting this and that together," continues the gossip, "I can make out the whole thing. There was the meeting in the morning at the inn; Lady Shafton would *not* go to Lauder House to plead her own cause: the little niece, impatient to see her, and smarting under the quarrel with her grandmother, overtook her aunt just as the express train was starting; this was how it happened. As for the foreign governess—Peters says she went out with Miss Macdonald that evening—I don't clearly know about her, but it was a dull life that she had of it, and I dare say she wanted to get back to her own people."

Fortunate Agnes, to be left to the fabrications of the gossips; but, oh, more fortunate to have your secret faithfully kept by them who knew it!

The meeting of Agnes and her grandmother, and the return of Lady Shafton, invited, honoured, welcomed to the roof from which she had fled twenty years before, have something too sacred to

be briefly and abruptly described; better—far better—leave them to be imagined by readers who may have sympathised with the characters and circumstances of the sisters.

Blessed Season, when even reserved natures, warmed by its holy associations unbend, and cold hearts sometimes thaw to kindness and charity; it was a fit time for that happy reconciliation! And before the Christmas week had passed, not only was Lady Shafton her sister's guest, but her husband and her children were gathered round that venerable lady with respectful affection. Lady Macdonald's feelings were very strange. She was not happy, although new sources of happiness were opened to her. The wound of her recent grief was still fresh; but with that grief had come knowledge. Had some such grief come to her thirty years before, she would have been through the prime of her years a better and a nobler woman. Her pride at last had bent, she had learnt she was fallible; for even her prejudices told her, that had her system been perfect, "a Macdonald—and by her mother's side a Percy," as she loved to consider Agnes, could not have forgotten her dignity and proved a second "Black Sheep" in the family.

There was to be no new governess for Agnes; Lady Macdonald decided upon taking a house in town—to have finishing masters for her grand-daughter—to relinquish at nearly sixty years of age, her life of seclusion, and once again to enter into society.

"What are you going to do with my pet Edward?" she said one day to her sister. Months had now passed, and almost daily intercourse had removed all embarrassment from their conversation.

"Ah," replied Lady Shafton, "I wish I could positively answer. He is going back to college for a few months, but we must decide for him very soon."

"Would he like the army?"

"Only too well, as I have reason to know; but we have little interest and less money to promote him there."

"Money," said Lady Macdonald, after a short pause,—“money shall not be wanting; in short, I have taken a fancy to Edward, and you must leave him in my hands. I have interest, if I choose to use it; and so to-morrow I will write to the Commander-in-Chief—he will not refuse me.”

And so on the morrow she did. No one saw her letter, which, however, was short and business-like; but she enclosed two or three time-stained documents, the paper yellowed, the ink brown with age, and at the creases holding together but by fibres. These evidences of her husband's fame had been worn to shreds by frequent opening; for they had been to Lady Macdonald as dear and sacred as are relics of a saint to a superstitious devotee.

Her confidence was not misplaced. The Commander-in-Chief declared that “a request from the widow of Sir Andrew Macdonald was a command,”

and naming three regiments, requested her to choose between them.

"Dearest Margaret," exclaimed Lady Shafton, when the subject was under discussion, and perceiving which way her sister inclined, "these brilliant prospects for Edward terrify me in one respect. The officers of the ——th are, as everyone knows, noblemen or men of fortune—how can he with small means associate with them on equal terms?"

"I have thought of all this," said Lady Macdonald, promptly; "you forget that *I* have undertaken to provide for him. My dear Mary, I have been saving half my income for twenty years, and am richer than you suspect; and as for Agnes, her mother's fortune, secured to her, has already doubled by lying untouched. Edward is a gentleman every inch; and the Shaftons are one of the oldest families in England. I wonder, Mary, you never told me so."

"I never knew it," said Lady Shafton, smiling; "my husband cares only for his art, and I believe if the truth were to be told, would rather be descended from Michael Angelo's colour-grinder—if he had one—than from William the Conqueror."

"How extraordinary!" exclaimed Lady Macdonald, "and in such a man, with 'patrician' stamped in every movement."

"The stamp of genius, darling sister," exclaimed Lady Shafton, enraptured at this appreciation of her beloved husband at last.

"Nonsense; directly my attention was drawn to the subject I found out all about the family. There was a Sir Hugh Shafton distinguished in the wars of the Roses, and a descendent of his intermarried with the Howards. Some of the oldest families in England have fallen into similar decay."

Later that day Lady Macdonald observed,

"If Agnes were to marry a gentleman wanting fixed position, I could easily obtain the restoration of the Baronetcy extinct by the failure of male heirs. The Government would not refuse me."

Ah! it was easy to see in what direction her thoughts were roaming! Edward's words on the night he came to Lauder House, as the herald of peace and reconciliation, had never left her memory; that declaration of pity and sympathy for Agnes, which had drawn from her the exclamation, "You—you, but no other." Her own words seemed to haunt her, and point to but one result. Nor was there in this the inconsistency which at first there seems. Pride, her ruling passion, was still her ally; it taught her that Agnes could never wed without a confession of her early fault; and yet, how was the revelation to be endured? Poor Agnes! No girl or woman ever commits your fault without having some penalty to pay!

Perhaps, too, the consideration in which Lady Macdonald perceived Sir William Shafton and his family were held, had its weight; for at his house she met the bearers of ancient names who paid

homage to genius, and moved, without a dream of condescension, among the new nobility—the aristocracy of active intellect—which is ruling the world. Though her mind had rusted by torpor, Lady Macdonald was far too clever not to recognise the fact, that while she had secluded herself to rear two generations, the world had rolled on to a brighter, purer atmosphere than was known when she left it. Military Glory was well and right when duly earned, and it had made way for the Victories of Peace; but the world had other glories also now. Her head whirled sometimes when she thought of these things,—yet she did not turn away from the contemplation.

But what of the persons chiefly concerned? very naturally asks the reader; what of Edward Shafton and Agnes Macdonald themselves? Why, that there was much in]their age,[relationship—which though distant, was relationship still,—and the peculiar circumstances of their position, which drew them insensibly nearly, dearly, and intimately together; and that every one about them was far too prudent to mar the project which everybody wished fulfilled, by appearing to know anything about it.

Yet there was a marriage in the family, and that the first year of Lady Macdonald's residence in London.

The stranger of the railway-carriage fulfilled his promise of calling in Wimpole Street, and sent in his card, "Mr. Gerald Wentmore!" He was a

rich man now, and on the eve of being returned member for a northern county,—on Lady Macdonald's side of politics too. Need we tell of the second wooing of her who had refused, but truly loved him? Enough that, though Hester listened to the story of his faith, kept unchanged through years,—faith to a sentiment, a remembrance, he did not tell her of the words repeated by the pretended Baroness, and which fanned once more into a flame the smouldering embers of hope. Very likely she has owned to him the truth which they conveyed; but lovers' *tête-à-têtes* are sacred, even though the lovers be no longer young.

Nothing positive is known of the "Baroness" and her brother; but a pair, singularly like them from description, have been recently convicted as swindlers.

And now for our further facts we are indebted to the *Morning Post*. Among the presentations at her Majesty's last drawing-room we read—"Mrs. Gerald Wentmore, on her marriage, by her sister, Lady Macdonald," and "Miss Macdonald, by her aunt Lady Shafton." And lower down, among the *on dits*, there was this paragraph:—

"It is confidently reported that a marriage is on the *tapis* between the beautiful and accomplished Miss Macdonald, grand-daughter of the late Sir Andrew Macdonald, Bart., K.C.B., &c. &c., and the gallant Captain Shafton, of the —th Dragoons, only son of our English Correggio, Sir William Shafton."

OUR NEW SHOPS.

It is not worth while to point out a precise locality for the story I have to tell. Every one knows how new neighbourhoods arise on the outskirts of old ones, springing up by the builder's art with almost the rapidity of enchantment, altering the map of the district completely, and puzzling the "oldest inhabitant" to find his way about, should business or pleasure have driven him from home for even a few weeks, or illness have kept him within the house. One always feels an interest in the first occupants of pretty new houses. Whether they are a young couple just arrived from the bridal tour, in the busy delight of arranging their dwelling, and preparing for the half-dreaded reception-days; or a staid elderly pair retiring from business, and looking forward to a serene old age, earned and deserved by the untiring industry of youth and middle life, there always seems to be a fresh start in existence associated with a new house, and a halo of hope shed

about it, which seldom belong to the adoption of a long-used, if not time-honoured, residence. And if such feelings are associated with the "Terraces" and the "Crescents," and the pretty Cottages, called Gothic, perhaps, but belonging to no order of architecture under the sun, they certainly exist in a ten-fold degree in reference to the rows of new *shops* which pertain to a new neighbourhood in an indispensable manner. True, at the first glance the subject may seem less picturesque; but the interest arising from it is far more intense—just as to my mind the thronging associations of London itself are more full of heart-stirring poetry than the loveliest scenes over which a painter ever revelled.

The bold adventurers—the first occupants of the new shops! The broad outlines of their histories are often very similar. Too poor to buy an established business, they seek a new neighbourhood with the hope of making one, and raise the money necessary for even this purpose by stratagems and self-denial, and the sacrifice of independence, and too often by a sufferance of painful obligation of which the affluent and well-to-do can form but a faint idea. There is no doubt that a new shop—just as youth can dispense with many of the adventitious ornaments of dress—may make a respectable appearance with fewer equipments than are necessary to the old, dusty, rusty-looking shelves and counter. Besides, for a considerable time, it looks as if it were still undergoing the process of furnishing, and the visitor

is inclined to judge favourably of the future from the promises of the present. If the first occupant can struggle through a twelvemonth, he has a fair chance of success ; but how often do we find at the end of less than half that time the shutters closed, and a board affixed indicating that the house is again to let, or perhaps the announcement—"This shop will be opened next week as a butcher's ;" or the linen-draper's converted into a cheesemonger's with almost the dexterity which follows the touch of the harlequin's wand. And then comes a new question—an enigma for time to solve :—will the second comer be more fortunate than his predecessor, or he too be a Curtius in the gulf? As genius that is "before its time" fails to be appreciated, and finds no portion of the earth's inheritance parcelled out for its mundane uses, so the shopkeeper who comes before he is wanted meets a bitter lot, and barrenness in return for all his industry!

Our new shops stand in the high road, where it seems but the other day was all open ground, with a ditch running between it and the path. Were the day ever so calm, there was always a breeze in passing along, and in boisterous weather one found oneself between the Scylla and Charybdis of the ditch and the road, whither weak-limbed pedestrians were often drifted at the will of the winds. But the land was drained, the ditch dried up, foundations were sunk, and houses built before half the neighbours knew what was going to happen ; and wonderment

as to what shops they would be had not half exhausted itself when their physiognomy was openly revealed, and cards and notes sent round to every house soliciting patronage, and promising, of course, "despatch and punctuality," the "best" goods at the "lowest" prices, "indefatigable attention," and the "newest improvements."

The houses were finished, and the first occupants entered within a very few weeks of each other; and great was the sensation created thereby. Everybody was inclined to "try" something from the new shops, and from the proverbial excellence of samples, most people were satisfied with the results. Nevertheless, by that principle of conservatism which is part of the national character, the greater number of temporary customers went back to their old tradespeople, putting up with the inconvenience of the distance so often complained of in the "olden time." To the thoughtful observer it was pretty evident the new shops would have a hard struggle ere they could be expected to prosper. Now, as necessaries are sought before luxuries, it may be taken as a pretty general rule that the dealers in food settling in a new neighbourhood have a better chance of success than they who open emporiums of more superfluous articles. People have daily need of bread, and meat, and tea, and butter, and commonly procure them at the nearest dépôt; whereas they can bide their time about the purchase of a new coat or dress, and commonly take the recommendation of a friend in selecting a silver-

smith or upholsterer. Consequently, the butcher, the baker, and the general dealer were, among the new comers, those who flourished the most speedily and decidedly; and it is to the last mentioned I would more particularly refer.

George West was a young man of five or six and twenty. He had started in business with the advantage of being unencumbered by debt, having recently inherited a legacy of a few hundred pounds from a relative, which money had stocked his shop and furnished his house, and left him still somewhat before the world. He could afford to wait a little while, till business gathered round him; and gather it did; for, in the first place, such a shop as his was greatly wanted in the district; and, secondly, he had good articles, which, joined to strict integrity and attention on his part, soon won him patrons and friends. Occupied with his business, and intent upon it, he had small time for either listening to or repeating gossip, and perhaps knew less of the affairs of his neighbours than any one in the "row." Pretty nearly all he did glean was from his woman-servant, a middle-aged body who had been in the service of his deceased uncle many years, and who now thought herself entitled to advise her youthful employer in all matters in which it appeared to her that experience should give her authority. Truth to tell, Patty was not always a good angel at her master's elbow. The same advice which is very valuable to the open-handed or the spendthrift may be something more than unneces-

sary to one whose example has been parsimony, and whose habits are frugal. George West was not by nature either mean or selfish, but at this time he was very much the creature of early habits and example; and he certainly loved money, without very clearly defining if it were for itself or its noble uses.

It was commonly while laying the cloth for her master's bread-and-cheese supper, after the shop was closed, that Patty opened her budget. By the way, Patty belonged to the old school, and was quite opposed to the early-closing movement: she thought shopkeepers should take money as long as it was offered them, and was far too obtuse to understand that if people could not purchase what they wanted after seven o'clock, they would contrive to do so before. She thought reading and improving the mind all "rubbish," or, at best, only fit for "gentle-folks." And yet Patty was not hard-hearted; she was only ignorant and prejudiced. *Only!* Alas, what an admission—for ignorance and prejudice are more fruitful causes of suffering than hard-heartedness itself!

"Have the Smiths paid that bill," asked Patty, as she placed the loaf upon the table.

"No," replied West; "I think I will send in for it to-morrow."

"You'll not get it for once sending, I can tell you," continued Martha; "they are all going to the mischief, it is pretty plain. Hardly a bit of business

doing—go in when you will—though that stuck-up son makes himself mighty busy, rolling and unrolling the silks and the ribbons, to hide that he has nothing better to do.”

“I am very sorry,” said West, “for really they seem a respectable and industrious family.”

“Respectable, indeed! respectable people pay their bills every week.”

“Well, I’ll send in to-morrow; I should not like to lose my money.”

“I should think not, indeed! Then there’s the Burtons next door—pray do you ever expect to see their two pound fifteen and sixpence?”

“Perhaps not,” said the young tradesman with a sigh, “but the loss will not ruin me; and I cannot find in my heart to be hard upon a lone widow woman.”

“Mr. George!” exclaimed Patty, dropping a knife, and very nearly damaging the crockery, in her astonishment and indignation, “that’s not the way to do business. I’m sure it’s enough to bring your dear dead uncle out of his grave, to hear you talk so. Lone widow, indeed! Lone widows should not run into debt, and then they would keep out of trouble. But I spoke my mind this morning, I can tell you.”

“You did! And whom to?” replied West, starting in his chair.

“Why, to that minx of a daughter. Just to look at her little white hands when she ties up a parcel,

or lifts down a book, might convince anyone they had never done a day's work in her life: and pride and poverty *is* what I can't abide."

"I never saw any pride," said George West, gravely; "and I am very sorry, very angry, Martha, if you have been rude about the bill. Even if they are proud, you ought to make some allowance, for Miss Burton has been genteelly brought up; her father was a gentleman, they say; and it's a great fall in the world to come down to keeping a little stationer's shop and circulating library."

"A pretty gentleman, indeed! that didn't leave enough to bury him. I tell you what, Mr. George, gentility is just worth what grist it will bring to the mill, and I don't understand what it has to do with your two pound fifteen and sixpence;" and the elderly spinster bounced out of the room in anything but a gentle mood.

George West felt more annoyed than he had done for a long time. He did not relish his frugal supper so much as usual; and his uncomfortable feelings even disturbed his rest. The way to confer a kindness delicately seldom occurs very readily to people unaccustomed to such an exercise; and it must be owned the nobler qualities of his heart were at present, for want of exercise, but partially developed. And yet a sort of instinct prompted him to do something to remove the unpleasant impression he felt sure his officious servant had created. Certainly, Patty had anything but a blessing from her young

master that night; but finally, he resolved that he would go into the stationer's shop the next day, make some purchase, and see what turn events might take. And this resolution arrived at, he fell asleep, and dreamed—of the price of sugars, and a shameful imposition of sloe-leaves for tea!

Alas! for poor Mrs. Burton's speculation! She was "before her time:" a fancy stationer or circulating library was not yet wanted in the new neighbourhood; and the absence of occupation for herself and daughter in the business of the shop gave ample leisure for thought—sad recollections of the past, and gloomy forebodings for the future. Alice was indefatigable in her exertions. The most tasteful articles which ornamented the shop window, and attracted the passers-by, were made by her; and the Berlin wool-work which had lately been added to their stock were all improvements upon the formal patterns. It was about seven o'clock on a summer evening, and she was seated in the little back parlour, busily employed on a large piece of canvass, when George West paid his intended visit. Not a step had crossed the threshold for the last hour; and the widow moved quickly forward to ask the stranger's wishes—for she did not at the moment recognise her "creditor." Attired in his holiday suit, and with scrupulous neatness, the young tradesman looked a different personage from the eager man of business behind his counter. Alice had involuntarily looked up and acknowledged *her* recog-

nition of their neighbour by a slight bow, but had bent again immediately over her work.

Perhaps had Alice Burton sat for her picture, she would not have appeared to more advantage than she did on this chance occasion. Her well-fitting mourning dress set off her slight but symmetrical figure to advantage, and contrasted favourably with a complexion that was pale without being sickly. The slanting rays of the western sun threw her person into shadow, concealing the shabbiness of her attire, but glancing on the plaited masses of her rich brown hair, and drawing out that golden tinge which only a strong light shows: while the bright tints of scarlet and purple, and green, and amber wools growing into meaning beneath her fingers were not without their effect.

The widow's cheek flushed from many painful emotions, as she recognised young West; for she had little doubt he came to require the payment of a bill she had not the money to discharge. How was she surprised when, instead of alluding to it, he made friendly inquiries about the health of herself and Miss Burton—offered some commonplace remarks on the weather, and then inquired the price of a pair of screens which were exhibited for sale in the window.

"Alice, my love," said Mrs. Burton, appealing to her daughter, "I do not understand this mark; will you tell me what these are priced at?"

And Alice came forward to give the desired information; in the doing which it was elicited that the

screens were painted by her. Had the sum been five times that named, George West would now have made the purchase; as it was, without demur he took the money from his pocket, watching the while the movement of the white hands which Patty had remarked as they folded the screens in paper. Again the colour mounted to Mrs. Burton's cheek as she gently pushed back the sovereign he had laid down for change, saying—"No, sir, we are in your debt much more than this—pray let your purchase be placed to that account."

It was George West's turn now to look confused. The proposition was so reasonable and natural, that he had nothing to say against it, and yet the idea of *her* painting being bartered for such commodities as sugar and cheese, and soap and candles, had something in it against which his feelings revolted. There seemed to be no other plan of soothing them than by making his purchases far outweigh the amount of the widow's debt. He looked round—there was nothing else of the daughter's work which it would not have seemed absurd for him to appropriate; and meanwhile he had fallen into conversation with Alice herself, during which allusion was made to the cheap literature of the day, the most choice of which lay in profusion on the counter. Alice possessed that fine taste which in all things instinctively selects the good and leaves the indifferent as refuse; and though really but little indebted to teachers for instruction, she was for her station in life well-

informed. The young tradesman felt her superiority, but without any painful humiliation to himself. It only made his reverence and admiration the deeper; and at the recommendation of Alice he expended several pounds in books, and in purchasing sets and back numbers of established publications.

But George West could not stand all the evening talking across the counter; and from a mingled feeling of pride, and sense of obligation, and many emotions she would be at a loss to analyse, Mrs. Burton did not invite him into the parlour. As for Patty's indignation on discovering her master's "extravagance," anything short of her own vocabulary would be insufficient to describe it. A vivid imagination may picture the scene which followed—a scene that would have been entirely ludicrous, had there not been something really piteous in the old woman's evident anguish. The screens—not suspecting they were Alice's own production—she might have tolerated. "Yes, they were pretty, and would look well on the up-stairs chimney piece—not that he wanted such things at all: but as for books, what good could they do him?—what use were they, except to come into the shop as waste paper?" Poor Martha!—for one must pity a deposed tyrant—and not suspecting that a new dynasty was established, she believed that chaos was come again in the wreck and revolution she witnessed. The tears rolled down her withered cheeks as she left her master

after supper, with a fresh candle just set up, and the pile of his new purchases by his side. Her prophetic fears told her that he would read till midnight, and she turned away with gesture and expression something like those of Hogarth's steward in the "Marriage à-la-Mode!"

And night after night was Martha doomed to witness a similar arrangement. At first, George West devoted the end of his toiling day to reading, because the books and journals he had purchased were those Alice Burton had recommended; but as weeks and months passed on, and these were exhausted and fresh ones procured, he read because the enlargement and cultivation of his mind had grown to be a moral want of his nature. What a debt of obligation he owed to the gentle girl who had thus led him to a new and brighter world than he had dwelt in before! A debt which from the depths of his heart he understood and acknowledged. Yet, as day by day, he became really more worthy of the love to which he had aspired, his own diffidence increased—till he shuddered to remember how, in the early days of their acquaintance, he had dared almost to avow his admiration, and had met with a silent yet chilling rebuke, which he now felt was less severe than his presumption merited.

And who was Alice Burton, who had worked such a spell on the heart of the thrifty, thriving tradesman? Only a very woman, such as—thank God!—the world abounds with. It was true her

father had been "a gentleman," an officer whom adverse fortune had compelled to sell his commission; but through such straits of poverty and sore distress had Alice been reared, that her advantages of education had really been infinitely inferior to those of George West. It was the instinct of her sex and her nature which had taught her, apparently from such sterile opportunities, taste, refinement, and that peculiar understanding of the fitness of all things which is a gift to the soul only second to genius itself. Who can fathom the mysterious laws by which the odorous garden flower develops its beautiful being from the same soil and atmosphere that feed a thousand noxious weeds?

Oh, Love—Love! That tale as old as Eve in Paradise, and yet for ever new: that Power which has swayed the hearts of the world's rulers, and yet given strength to the weakest, and taken refuge in the breast of the hind. Love, the sustainer—ennobler—and purifier; for no one ever really loved without becoming—however good and great before—a better and nobler being. Thousands pass off the stage of life—aye, spouses and parents too—in utter ignorance of that Divine Mystery, or mistaking for that which is the most generous emotion of the soul, a degrading and selfish passion. Let us hope all things from the nature that is capable of loving; and let us cease to rail at a world which Love illumines, even though its light shines fitfully and feebly, obscured by the mists of narrow teaching; and its tongue is

constrained to silence by senseless deafening railery, Let the poets plead : they are the only truth tellers.

The true lover is no selfish idle dreamer ; be his station what it may, he must act the poetry his heart conceives : and George West was no exception to the rule. During the very time that his evenings were devoted to the cultivation of his mind, and every hope of his heart was centred in the thought of growing more worthy of Alice Burton, his business increased beyond his warmest expectations. Nor was this surprising. No time-exhausting, or expensive, or thought-distracting pleasures had taken him from the duties of his station ; and in a few months he was the most prosperous tradesman in the "row." Already had he saved sufficient money to carry out what had once been a most dear object—the purchase of the house he occupied. But now it must be differently bestowed ; he became the owner of the "next door," taking upon himself the arrears of rent due from Mrs. Burton, and becoming, be sure, a lenient landlord.

Not yet had a word of love been spoken, though both remembered the occasion which George thought of with so much regret. On the part of Alice, too, there was some remorse : now she felt that she had been unnecessarily cold and harsh. How strange the change his silent, respectful homage had effected ; aye, and the change which had taken place in his whole bearing and character since love's holy influence had sway. Alice wondered if he really were

altered, or if it had been some strange fancy which had painted him on their first acquaintance as common-place and uninteresting.

Again Alice sat in the little parlour, with the bright-hued threads growing into forms of beauty beneath her fingers. But now the season was towards the close of a long and dreary winter; and instead of western sunlight, the flickering fire and the beams of a shaded lamp lit up the room. Mrs. Burton was engaged in attending to the wants of two or three ladies in the shop, and, agitated and excited by some information she had just received, was anything but expeditious in supplying them. She had learned within that hour that their young neighbour was now their landlord; and on this fact, relying as she did on his forbearance with regard to the arrears of rent, she built anew bright hopes of ultimate success, and of at last a thriving business. Like the oversanguine in general, she believed that time was all she needed.

It was at this moment George West entered, and nodding good-humouredly to Mrs. Burton, passed on with the familiarity of an intimate acquaintance to the little parlour. Alice had thought he would come in that evening, and yet his step made her heart beat more quickly—that heart which was so full of strange contending feelings, and in which gratitude was to her own consciousness the most apparent. Her embarrassment was evident; yet it did not pain George West: on the contrary, he saw

in it something of encouragement, and he grew emboldened enough to hold her hand for a moment longer than ordinary greeting demanded. Alice blushed, and the tears started—nay, rolled down her cheeks, as she felt constrained to utter some expressions of gratitude; for the widow and her daughter had already received many kindnesses at his hands, and it would have been affectation to have seemed ignorant of the generous purpose which had actuated his purchase of the house. George West stammered forth some common-place rejoinder; but that moment of confusion broke away a barrier of reserve; for the first time a wild hope darted through his frame, that Alice deigned to regard him a thought more warmly than as a kind friend; while on her part she could no longer doubt that she was the object of a deep attachment. With this knowledge came a thorough appreciation of his generous forbearance.

Time had been when Alice Burton, despite her own fallen fortunes, had been strongly imbued with the foolishness of all foolish false pride; that which attaches nominal rank to nominal station. But, though yet little more than twenty years old, the sorrows and struggles of life, and contact with its realities, had taught her a nobler lesson. In former times, when the classes beneath the gentry remained for the most part in the darkness of ignorance, things were very different. But now, with a wiser generation, class distinctions have really little

weight. True, we still decline associating intimately with the masses greatly below us in station; but only *because*, for the most part, they are deficient in the cultivation of mind which would render them companions; in the tone of feeling congenial to our own; and in those manners and habits which are the atmosphere of our social existence. The ignorant and vulgar are too apt to slight the last attributes as frivolous and unmeaning attainments; but a wider grasp of thought will teach them that a wholesome refinement of manner is but the outward sign of an indescribable but all-pervading essence most essential to real progress. Let the individual, though still remaining of his class, yet raise himself by his mental and moral qualities above its standard, and he will find the ready hand held out — no shrinking on the part of his so-called superiors from equalising association.

Alice Burton had grown to think George West as complete a "gentleman" as she had ever known — But why go on? The reader has already arrived at the sequel, and intermediate details are becoming tedious. But it was not *that* night he dared to breathe his tale, — no, nor for many subsequent evenings, when he sat watching her nimble fingers, and really saying very little, considering how much there was he longed to tell! At last — it was some weeks afterwards, and Mrs. Burton had been more than commonly engaged in the shop — some word was dropped — they hardly

know themselves how it came about—in short, it was the old yet ever new scene, which everybody can either remember or imagine. Tears—confessions—endearing words—not vows—there was no occasion for *them*, being but too often the spurious coinage of insincerity.

All this happened three years since! There was a wedding long ago. Mrs. West is very seldom seen in her husband's business; but she is an excellent wife nevertheless, and manages his household, and keeps his accounts admirably. Nor are these any trifling tasks, I assure you; for he has been obliged to purchase the *other* "next door," and throw it into his own shop, and has full employment for several busy assistants. Mrs. Burton has also by this time an excellent business, and, to tell a family secret, is to pay rent for her house—some day or another.

I had nearly forgotten to chronicle Patty's destiny. She could not live under the new system of things—the attempt would have broken her heart. And so she has gone to reside with her friends in the country, on the savings of her long and penurious life. Be sure her nephews and nieces have due reverence for her opinions, and avoid offering her any temptations to extravagance. They believe, above all things, in mattresses stuffed with bank-notes, and old stockings full of gold!

LADY LUCY'S SECRET.

"With clamorous demands of debt, broken bonds,
And the detention of long-since-due debts,
Against my honour." TIMON OF ATHENS.

"How in the turmoil of life can love stand,
Where there is not one heart, and one mouth, and
one hand?" LONGFELLOW.

IN a charming morning-room of a charming London house, neighbouring Hyde-Park, there lounged over the breakfast-table a wedded pair—the rich merchant Ferrars, and his young wife, the Lady Lucy. Five years of married life had, in most respects, more than realised the brightest hopes which had been born and cherished in the dreaming days of courtship. Till the age of forty the active mind of Walter Ferrars had been chiefly occupied by business—not in mean, shuffling, speculative dealings, but on the broad basis of large transactions and an almost chivalrous system of integrity.

Then, when a secured position and the privileges of wealth had introduced him to that inner circle of

English society which not wealth *alone* can penetrate, but where wealth in some due proportion is an element necessary to hold fast a place, it was thought most natural and proper that he should choose a wife from the class which seems set apart from the rest of womankind, like the choice flowers of a conservatory, on whom no rude breath must blow. The youthful but nearly portionless daughter of a poor Earl seemed the very bride decreed by some angel for the merchant-prince.

But though the nuptials fulfilled nearly all the requirements of a *mariage de convenance*, there was in reality very much more of the ingredients in their hearts which amalgamate into very genuine "love" than always meet at the altar; though, of course, "the World" resolutely refused to believe anything of the sort—the World, which is capable of so much kindness, and goodness, and justice, among its individuals, taken "separately and singly," and yet is such a false, malignant, many-headed monster in its corporate body! Walter Ferrars had a warm heart, that yearned for affection, as well as a clear head; and, fascinated as he had been by the youthful grace and beauty, the high-bred repose of manner, and cultivated talents of the Lady Lucy, he set himself resolutely to win and keep her girlish heart, not expecting that the man of forty was to obtain it without an effort. Thus, when he assumed a husband's name, he did not "drop the lover." His was still the watchful care, made up of the

thousand little thoughtful kindnesses of daily life, neither relaxed in a *tête-à-tête*, nor increased in public. He was the pleased and ready escort for every occasion, save only when some imperative business claimed his time and presence; and these calls now were rare, for he had long since arrived at the position when efficient servants and assistants carry out the plans a superior has organised.

Is there wonder that the wife was grateful? Few—few women indeed are insensible to the power of continued kindness; they may have a heart of stone for the impetuous impulsive lover; but habitual tenderness, that seems so unselfish, touches the finest chords of their nature, and awakens affection that might have lain dormant through a long life, but for this one sweet influence. Thus it was that the wife of five years loved her husband with an almost adoring worship: She had felt her own mind expand in the intimate communion with his fine intellect; she had felt her own weaknesses grow less, as if she had absorbed some of his strength of character, and she had recognised the very dawn of principles and opinions which had been unknown to her in the days of her thoughtless, ignorant, inexperienced girlhood. And yet with all her love, with all her matured intelligence, she had never lost a certain awe of her husband, which his seniority had perhaps first implanted, and alas! one fatal circumstance had gone far to render morbid.

They sat at breakfast. It was early spring; and

though the sunshine streamed through the windows, and from one of them there crept the odours of the conservatory, a bright fire gleamed and crackled in the grate, and shed a charm of cheerfulness through the room. Mr. Ferrars had a newspaper in his hand, but not yet had he perused a line, for his son and heir, a brave boy of three years old, a very model of patrician beauty, was climbing his large chair, playing antics of many sorts, and even affecting to pull his father's still rich and curling hair, so little awe had the young Walter of the head of the house; while Mr. Ferrars' parental glee was like a deep bass to the child's crowing laugh. Lady Lucy smiled too, but she shook her head, and said more than once, "Naughty papa is spoiling Watty." It was a pretty scene; the room was redolent of elegance, and the young mother, in her simple but tasteful morning dress, was one of its chief ornaments. Who would think that beneath all this sweetness of life there was still a serpent!

A post was just in, and a servant entered with several letters; among those delivered to Lady Lucy were two or three large, unsightly, ill-shaped epistles, that seemed strange company for the others. An observing stranger might have noticed that Lady Lucy's cheek paled, and then flushed; that she crushed up her letters together, without immediately opening them, and that presently she slid the ugly ones into the pocket of her satin apron. Mr. Ferrars read his letters almost with a glance, for they were

masculine letters, laconic, and to the point, conveying necessary information in three lines and a half; and he smiled, as after awhile he observed his wife apparently intent on a truly feminine epistle, four sides of delicate paper closely crossed, and exclaimed gaily,

"My dear Lucy, there's an hour's reading for you at least; so I shall ring and send Watty to the nursery, and settle steadily to the *Times*."

But though Lady Lucy really perused the letter, her mind refused to retain the pleasant chit-chat gossip it contained. Her thoughts were far away, and had she narrowly examined her motives she would have known that she bent over the friendly sheet chiefly as an excuse for silence, and to conceal her passing emotions. Meanwhile the newspaper gently crackled in her husband's hand as he moved its broad leaves.

Presently Mr. Ferrars started with an exclamation of grief and astonishment that completely roused his absent wife.

"My dear Walter, what has happened?" she asked with real anxiety.

"A man a bankrupt, whom I thought as safe as the Bank of England. Though, it is true, people talked about him months ago, spoke suspiciously of his personal extravagance, and above all, said that his wife was ruining him."

"His wife!"

"Yes; but I cannot understand that sort of thing. A few hundreds a year more or less could be of little moment to a man like Beaufort, and I

don't suppose she spent more than you do, my darling. At any rate, she was never better dressed. Yet I believe the truth was, that she got frightfully into debt unknown to him; and debt is a sort of thing that multiplies itself in a most astonishing manner, and sows by the wayside the seeds of all sorts of misery. Then people say that when pay-day came at last, bickerings ensued, their domestic happiness was broken up, Beaufort grew reckless, and plunged into the excitement of the maddest speculations."

"How dreadful!" murmured Lady Lucy.

"Dreadful indeed! I don't know what I should do with such a wife."

"Would not you forgive her if you loved her very much?" asked Lady Lucy, and she spoke in the singularly calm tone of suppressed emotion.

"Once, perhaps, once; and if her fault were the fault of youthful inexperience. But so much falsehood, mean deception, and mental deterioration must have accompanied such transactions, that—— in short, I thank heaven that I have never been put to the trial."

As he spoke, the eyes of Mr. Ferrars were fixed on the leading article of the *Times*, not on his wife. Presently Lady Lucy glided from the room, without her absence being at the moment observed. Once in her dressing-room, she turned the key, and sinking into a low chair, gave vent to her grief in some of the bitterest tears she had ever shed. She, too,

was in debt; "frightfully," her husband had used the right word; "hopelessly," so far as satisfying her creditors, even out of the large allowance Mr. Ferrars made her; and still she had not the courage voluntarily to tell the truth, which yet she knew must burst upon him ere long. From what small beginnings had this upas shadow come upon her! And what "falseness, mean deception, and mental deterioration" had truly been hers!

Even the fancied relief of weeping was a luxury denied to her, for she feared to show the evidence of tears; thus after a little while she strove to drive them back, and by bathing her face before the glass, and drawing the braids of her soft hair a little nearer her eyes, she was tolerably successful in hiding their trace. Never, when dressing for court or gala, had she consulted her mirror so closely; and now, though the tears were dried, she was shocked at the lines of anguish, those delvers of the wrinkles of age, which marked her countenance. She sat before her looking-glass, one hand supporting her head, the other clutching the hidden letters which she had not yet the courage to open. There was a light tap at the door.

"Who is there?" inquired Lady Lucy.

"It is I, my lady," replied Harris, her faithful maid. "Madame Dalmás is here."

Lady Lucy unlocked her door and gave orders that the visitor should be shown up. With the name had come a flush of hope that some trifling

temporary help would be hers. Madame Dalmas called herself a Frenchwoman, and signed herself "Antoinette," but she was really an English Jewess of low extraction, whose true name was Sarah Solomons. Her "profession" was to purchase and sell the cast-off apparel of ladies of fashion; and few of the sisterhood have carried the art of double cheating to so great a proficiency. With always a roll of bank notes in her old leathern pocket-book, and always a dirty canvass bag full of bright sovereigns in her pocket, she had ever the subtle temptation for her victims ready.

Madame Dalmas, for she must be called according to the name engraved on her card, was a little meanly-dressed woman of about forty, with bright eyes and a hooked nose, a restless shuffling manner, and an ill-pitched voice. Her jargon was a mixture of bad French and worse English.

"Bon jour miladi Lucy," she exclaimed as she entered Lady Lucy's sanctum; "need not inquire of health, you look si charmante. Oh, si belle! that make you wear old clothes so longer dan oder ladies, and have so leetel for me to buy. Milady Lucy Ferrars know she look well in anyting, but yet she should not wear old clothes: no right—for example—for de trade—and de hoosband always like de wife well dressed—ha—ha!"

Poor Lady Lucy! Too sick at heart to have any relish for Madame Dalmas' nauseous compliments, and more than half aware of her cheats and false-

hoods, she yet tolerated the creature from her own dire necessities.

"Sit down, Madame Dalmas," she said; "I am dreadfully in want of money; but I really don't know what I have for you."

"De green velvet, which you not let me have before Easter, I still give you four pounds for it, though perhaps you worn it very much since then."

"Only twice—only seven times in all—and it cost me twenty guineas," sighed Lady Lucy.

"Ah, but so old-fashioned; I do believe I not see my money for it. Voyez-vous, de Lady Lucy is one petite lady—si jolie mais très petite. If she were de tall grand lady, you see de great dresses could fit small lady, but de leetle dresses fit but ver few."

"If I sell the green velvet I must have another next winter," murmured Lady Lucy.

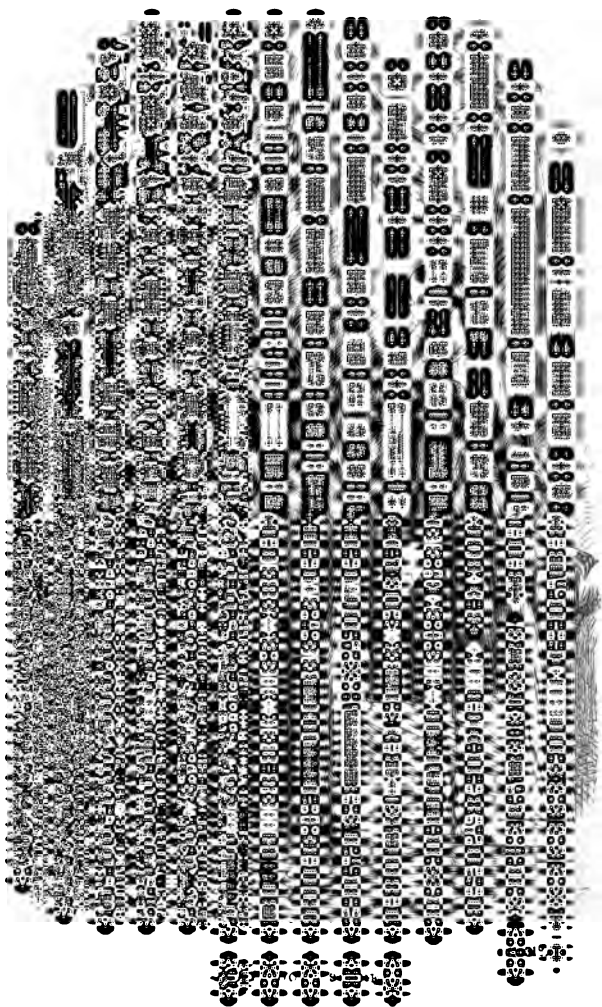
"Ah!—vous avez raison—when the season nouveautés come in. I tell you what—you let me have also de white lace robe you show me once, de same time I bought from you one little old pearl brooch."

"My wedding-dress? Oh, no, I cannot sell my wedding-dress!" exclaimed poor Lady Lucy, pressing her hands convulsively together.

"What for not?—you not want to marry over again—I give you twenty-two pounds for it."

"Twenty-two pounds!—why it is Brussels point, and cost a hundred and twenty."

"Ah! I know—but you forget I perhaps keep it ten years and not sell—and besides you buy dear;



great lady often buy ver dear!" and Madame Dalmas shook her head with the solemnity of a sage.

"No, no; I cannot sell my wedding-dress," again murmured the wife. And be it recorded, the temptress for once was baffled; but, at the expiration of an hour, Madame Dalmas left the house with a huge bundle under her arm, and a quiet satisfaction revealed in her countenance, had any one thought it worth while to study the expression of her disagreeable face.

Again Lady Lucy locked her door; and placing a bank note and some sovereigns on the table, she sank into a low chair, and while a few large silent tears flowed down her cheeks, she at last found courage to open the three letters which had hitherto remained unread in her apron pocket. The first—the second, seemed to contain nothing to surprise her, however much there might be to annoy; but it was different with the last; here was a gross overcharge; and perhaps it was not with quite a disagreeable feeling that Lady Lucy found something of which she could justly complain. She rose hurriedly and unlocked a small writing desk, which had long been used as a receptacle for old letters and accounts.

To tell the truth, the interior of the desk did not present a very orderly arrangement. Cards of address, bills paid and unpaid, copies of verses, and papers of many descriptions, were huddled together, and it was not by any means surprising that Lady Lucy failed in her search for the original account by

which to rectify the error in her shoemaker's bill. In the hurry and nervous trepidation which had latterly become almost a constitutional ailment with her, she turned out the contents of the writing-desk into an easy chair, and then kneeling before it, she set herself to the task of carefully examining the papers. Soon she came to one letter which had been little expected in that place, and which still bore the marks of a rose, whose withered leaves also remained, that had been put away in its folds. The rose Walter Ferrars had given her on the eve of their marriage, and the letter was in his handwriting, and bore but a few days' earlier date. With quickened pulses she opened the envelope; and though a mist rose before her eyes, it seemed to form into a mirror in which she saw the bygone hours. And so she read—and read.

It is the fashion to laugh at love-letters, perhaps because only the silly ones ever come to light. With the noblest of both sexes such effusions are sacred, and would be profaned by the perusal of a third person; but when a warm and true heart is joined to a manly intellect; when reason sanctions and constancy maintains the choice which has been made, there is little doubt that much of simple, truthful, touching eloquence is often to be found in a "lover's" letter. That which the wife now perused with strange and mingled feelings was evidently a reply to some girlish depreciation of herself, and contained these words:—

"You tell me that in the scanty years of your past life, you already look back on a hundred follies, and that you have unnumbered faults of character at which I do not even guess. Making some allowance for a figurative expression, I will answer 'it may be so.' What then? I have never called you an angel, and never desired you to be perfect. The weaknesses which cling, tendril-like, to a fine nature, not unfrequently bind us to it by ties we do not seek to sever. I know you for a true-hearted girl, but with the bitter lessons of life still unlearned; let it be my part to shield you from their sad knowledge—yet whatever sorrow or evil falls upon you I must or ought to share. Let us have no secrets; and while the truth, which gives its purest lustre to your eye, and its richest rose to your cheek, still reigns in your soul, I cannot dream of a fault grave enough to deserve harsher rebuke than the kiss of forgiveness."

What lines to read at such a moment! No wonder their meaning reached her mind far differently than it had done when they were first received. Then she could have little heeded it; witness how carelessly the letter had been put away—how forgotten had been its contents.

Her tears flowed in torrents, but Lucy Ferrars no longer strove to check them. And yet there gleamed through them a brighter smile than had visited her countenance for many a month. A resolve approved by all her better nature was growing firm

within her heart; and that which an hour before would have seemed too dreadful to contemplate was losing half its terrors. How often an ascent, which looks in the distance a bare precipice, shows us, when we approach its face, the notches by which we may climb!—and not a few of the difficulties of life yield to our will when we bravely encounter them.

“Why did I fear him so much?” murmured Lady Lucy to herself. “I ought not to have needed such an assurance as this to throw myself at his feet, and bear even scorn and rebuke, rather than prolong the reign of falsehood and deceit. Yes—yes,” and gathering a heap of papers in her hand, with the “love-letter” beneath them, she descended the stairs.

There is no denying that Lady Lucy paused at the library door—no denying that her heart beat quickly, and her breath seemed well-nigh spent; but she was right to act on the good impulse, and not wait until the new-born courage should sink.

Mr. Ferrars had finished the newspaper, and was writing an unimportant note; his back was to the door, and hearing the rustle of his wife’s dress, and knowing her step, he did not turn his head sufficiently to observe her countenance; but he said, good-humouredly,

“At last! What have you been about? I thought we were to go out before luncheon to look at the bracelet I mentioned to you.”

"No, Walter—no bracelet—you must never give me any jewels again;" and as Lady Lucy spoke she leaned against a chair for support. At such words her husband turned quickly round, started up, and exclaimed—

"Lucy, my love!—in tears—what has happened?" and finding that even when he wound his arm round her she still was mute, he continued, "Speak—this silence breaks my heart—what have I done to lose your confidence?"

"Not you—I—" gasped the wife. "Your words this morning—this letter—have rolled the stone from my heart—I must confess—the truth—I am like Mrs. Beaufort—in debt—frightfully in debt." And with a gesture, as if she would crush herself into the earth, she slipped from his arms and sank literally on the floor.

Whatever pang Mr. Ferrars felt at the knowledge of her fault, it seemed overpowered by the sense of her present anguish—an anguish that proved how bitter had been the expiation; and he lifted his wife to a sofa, bent over her with fondness, called her by all the dear pet names to which her ear was accustomed, and nearer twenty times than once gave her the "kiss of forgiveness."

"And it is of you I have been frightened!" cried Lady Lucy, clinging to his hand. "You who I thought would never make any excuses for faults you yourself could not have committed!"

"I have never been tempted."

"Have I? I dare not say so."

"Tell me how it all came about," said Mr. Ferrars, drawing her to him, "tell me from the beginning."

But his gentleness unnerved her—she felt choking—loosened the collar of her dress for breathing space—and gave him the knowledge he asked in broken exclamations.

"Before I was married—it—began. They persuaded me so many—oh, so many—unnecessary things were—needed. Then they would not send the bills—and I—for a long time—never knew—what I owed—and then—and then—I thought I should have the power—but—"

"Your allowance was not sufficient?" asked Mr. Ferrars, pressing her hand as he spoke.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes! most generous, and yet it was always forestalled to pay old bills; and then—and then my wants were so many. I was so weak. Madame Dalmas has had dresses I could have worn when I had new ones on credit instead, and—and Harris has had double wages to compensate for what a lady's-maid thinks her perquisites; even articles I might have given to poor gentlewomen I have been mean enough to sell. Oh, Walter! I have been very wrong; but I have been miserable for at least three years. I have felt as if an iron cage were rising round me,—from which you only could free me—and yet, till to-day, I think I could have died rather than confess to you."

"My poor girl! Why should you have feared me? Have I ever been harsh?"

"Oh, no!—no—but you are so just—so strict in all these things—"

"I hope I am; and yet not the less do I understand how all this has come about. Now, Lucy,—now that you have ceased to fear me—tell me the amount."

She strove to speak, but could not.

"Three figures or four? tell me."

"I am afraid—yes, I am afraid four," murmured Lady Lucy, and hiding her face from his view; "yes, four figures, and my quarter received last week gone every penny."

"Lucy, every bill shall be paid this day; but you must reward me by being happy."

"Generous! dearest! But, Walter, if you had been a poor man, what then?"

"Ah, Lucy, that would have been a very different and an infinitely sadder story. Instead of the relinquishment of some indulgence hardly to be missed, there might have been ruin, and poverty, and disgrace. You have one excuse,—at least you knew that I could pay at last."

"Ah, but at what a price! The price of your love and confidence."

"No, Lucy,—for your confession has been voluntary; and I will not ask myself what I should have felt had the knowledge come from another. After all, you have fallen by a temptation which besets the

wives of the rich far more than those of poor or struggling gentlemen. Tradespeople are shrewd enough in one respect—they do not press their commodities and long credit in quarters where ultimate payment seems doubtful—though——”

“They care not what domestic misery they create among the rich,” interrupted Lady Lucy, bitterly.

“Stay; there are faults on both sides, not the least of them being that girls in your station are too rarely taught the value of money, or that integrity in money matters should be to them a point of honour second only to one other. Now listen, my darling, before we dismiss this painful subject for ever. You have the greatest confidence in your maid, and *entre nous* she must be a good deal in the secret. We shall bribe her to discretion, however, by dismissing Madame Dalmas at once and for ever. As soon as you can spare Harris, I will send her to change a cheque at Coutts’, and then, for expedition and security, she shall take on the brougham and make a round to these tradespeople. Meanwhile, I will drive you in the phaeton to look at the bracelet.”

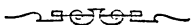
“Oh, no—no, dear Walter, not the bracelet.”

“Yes—yes—I say yes. Though not a quarrel, this is a sorrow which has come between us, and there must be a peace-offering. Besides I would not have you think that you had reached the limits of my will, and of my means to gratify you.”

“To think that I could have doubted—that I

could have feared you!" sobbed Lady Lucy, as tears of joy coursed down her cheeks. "But, Walter, it is not every husband who would have shown such generosity."

"I think there are few husbands, Lucy, who do not estimate truth and candour as among the chief of conjugal virtues:—ah, had you confided in me when first you felt the bondage of debt, how much anguish would have been spared you!"



MRS. SMITH AND MRS. BROWN.

A DOMESTIC DIALOGUE.

TIME—*Morning, July, 1851.*

SCENE.—*No. 7, Victoria Terrace, near London.*

[MRS. SMITH having allowed her cook to go to the Exhibition, allows her housemaid to be generally busy in departments not usually pertaining to the "neat-handed" Sarah; while Mrs. Smith herself, in morning dress, and remarkably pretty cap, dusts china ornaments in her "own sweet little drawing-room," pulls down Venetian blinds to spare her Axminster, and arranges softly and lovingly a few books on an ornamental table: but she loiters in a manner that a deputy housemaid ought not to do, dipping into the lovely illustrated "Evangeline" for full five minutes, still standing, but resting first on one side and then on the other, as little girls are always scolded for doing, and dropping into a chair, when in the dusting she glances at a page of the "Casa Guidi Windows," that had not struck her with its full force before. A patter of little feet is heard; the book is closed, and enter Susan the nursemaid, equipped for walking with Master Willy and Miss Katey, aged respectively four and two years. Bright eyes, soft, rosy cheeks, silken, curly locks, stream-

ing beneath large sun-shading Leghorn hats; short full skirts, and little Katey's coquettish cazaweck, and snowy-white socks and coal-black polished leather shoes, must be shown to paint their picture. Several demonstrative hugs between mother and children, somewhat to the detriment of Mrs. Smith's cap, are accompanied by crowing laughter.—“Dood-by, mamma; dood-by! Tusan, take us to see the twans; and such a nice walk! Dood-by!” And the four impatient little feet scamper away; Mrs. Smith, watching them out of the gate, as she peers between the bars of the blind. Then with a sudden thought she unrolls some new music, opens the piano, and with the manner of a brilliant player when trying a strange piece, repeats one or two difficult passages three or four times. A sharp double knock is heard, and the busy Sarah shows in Mrs. Brown: civil neighbourly greetings ensue.]

Mrs. Brown. I heard the piano going, and so judged you would see me, though it is hardly ten o'clock; but neighbours ought to be neighbourly, and, as I said to Mr. Brown, I was sure if you could help me you would.

Mrs. Smith. I am sure anything I can do——

Mrs. Brown. Oh, what a difference! [*Looking round with envious admiration.*] You can sit down in comfort to music the first thing in the morning.

Mrs. Smith. It is not my usual time for playing; but my husband brought me home some new quadrilles and a polka last night, and as we are going to a little carpet dance to-night, where I may be useful, I thought I would try them over. But what is it that I can do for you, Mrs. Brown?

Mrs. Brown. [*Sighing.*] My dear, you are a young wife—not married above five or six years—and you have had the luck to have *treasures* (trebly italicised); but as for me, servants are my torments. I sent off the whole pack last night, and have only a horrid charwoman in the house. Does your cook know of any friend she can recommend? That is what I wanted to ask you.

Mrs. Smith. I hardly think it likely, but I will ask Sarah if she knows any one. Cook is not at home; she is gone to the Exhibition.

Mrs. Brown. What, again! Then it was she that I saw so smart getting into the omnibus. Well, I must say you spoil them.

Mrs. Smith. [*Smiling.*] And yet I get on remarkably well. It is cook's third visit. I actually sent her to-day because she had neglected to go over the Model Lodging-Houses, and I wished her so much to see them.

Mrs. Brown. My dear Mrs. Smith, what could it signify?

Mrs. Smith. A good deal, I think. However, I do not wonder at the omission, as I believe on the first occasion she had no eyes for anything except the kitchen-ranges, her account of which interested me particularly. I know, with all my Friday and Saturday visits, I have not found them out yet.

Mrs. Brown. Is it possible you talk to your servants in this way?

Mrs. Smith. Why not? I assure you we always

consider our servants as humble friends, and interest ourselves in all that concerns them.

Mrs. Brown. But you wouldn't if you had such wretches as I have to deal with. Why, in eight months I have had five cooks, three housemaids, and four little imps in buttons; they have nearly broken my heart, and quite made differences between Mr. Brown and me; and it has been so all my life. Oh, Mrs. Smith! how do you manage? and where did you get your servants from?

Mrs. Smith. I hardly remember how I procured them—through some ordinary channel of recommendation, I believe; but I know I received excellent characters, which experience has convinced me they deserved. Indeed, I would not engage a servant unless her appearance, acquirements, and general recommendation were an earnest that she would suit. Then, when one has a good servant, kindness and consideration, with fair wages, will always keep her. In fact, I believe kindness is thought more of than wages by many, though we are of opinion that servants ought to receive good wages—enough to lay by for their old age.

Mrs. Brown. But they never do. It all goes in finery, and that is what I will not allow. It was a quarrel about a bonnet-ribbon that made me part with Mary at last. I put up with her impudence for four months, but couldn't endure it any longer.

Mrs. Smith. Certain limits are, no doubt, desirable; but a thoroughly good and *happy* servant

usually saves from her wages, and generally has sense enough not to dress absurdly. I do not care how good my servants' clothes are, both for the sake of their appearance and for economy, knowing well that cheap things are always the dearest in the end.

Mrs. Brown. [*Shaking her head with the wisdom of forty-five addressing the inexperience of twenty-eight.*] I see we shall never agree. I don't know what the world is coming to. Now there's the postman; I should not wonder if there are letters for the kitchen as well as for you.

Mrs. Smith. Very likely, for all the servants have relations in the country.

Enter SARAH, with a letter for Mrs. SMITH, and another in her hand.

Mrs. Brown. [*To Mrs. SMITH.*] May I ask her?

Mrs. Smith. I was just going to do so. [*To the housemaid.*] Sarah, Mrs. Brown wants a cook; do you know of one?

Sarah. I think I do. [*Hesitates and stammers.*] That is—no. I am afraid the young person I was thinking of would not suit you, ma'am.

Mrs. Brown. Not suit me, Sarah! What do you mean? Is she honest, clean, sober—a good cook?

Sarah. [*Indignant for her friend.*] Oh, yes, ma'am! but—but perhaps she would not do.

Mrs. Brown. Why not?

Sarah. You see, ma'am, it would be such a dreadful thing, if she didn't suit, to lose a five-

years' character, and only leaving because her master has lost money, and is reducing his establishment ; and she wants to stay with half wages, only he won't let her ; and so she is teaching the eldest daughter to know about cooking : and so, ma'am, she couldn't leave yet, and of course you couldn't wait. No, I don't know any servant, I am sure, that I should like to recommend.

Mrs. Brown. [*With a half glimmer that SARAH does know of a "treasure," but won't consign her to No. 5.*] Oh, very well ! I don't wish it to be considered a favour.

Sarah. Of course not, ma'am.

[*SARAH curtsies and leaves the room.*]

Mrs. Smith. [*Almost timidly.*] If it would not be considered presumptuous in me, so much younger a housekeeper, to give advice, I would say to you, when you can succeed in procuring good servants, try the plan of treating them indulgently. They are our fellow-creatures—with the same hopes and desires, failings and weaknesses, and infirmities of temper—we must not expect perfection—and if we show them *sympathy*, it is astonishing the influence——

Mrs. Brown. [*Decidedly tartly.*] Now I know what you are going to say ; but I never will give in to those new-fangled notions. I won't allow followers, and I won't allow letter-scribbling ; and what I say in my own house shall be done ; and I won't be answered by a minx ; and if I choose a thing to

be done one way one day, and another way another, what's that to them? What business have they to say that I don't know my own mind, and begin to cry, and to talk about their characters?

Mrs. Smith. [*A little warmly.*] Oh, Mrs. Brown, anger often terrifies a timid girl, not naturally dull, into seeming stupidity and obstinacy. I pity them from my heart; and I deeply feel a mistress has grave responsibilities towards her female servants. Servitude at best is an abandonment of liberty, and must bring many trials; how cruel of us to make it needlessly bitter by our caprices and exactions. And, on the other hand, what a happiness it is to feel oneself served from affection as well as duty. I speak from experience: our household is a household of love; these walls have never echoed to an angry reproof—there is no fear, there is no deception in the house; and I believe our servants feel it to be their *home*; it always gladdens me when I hear them call it so.

Mrs. Brown. It is all very fine, but how do you know that you are not cheated?

Mrs. Smith. From many circumstances, besides my own faith in those about me. I give you one for example: I know that our expenses are nearly a hundred a-year less than those of some friends who appear to live more plainly. But all in the house draw together to avoid waste, and all act without separate interests. The servants themselves are like sisters, and help one another—as in the case to-day

—in affectionate fellowship. If I give one of them a holiday, I scarcely know the difference in the house. I know people say I have been particularly “fortunate;” but is it not strange, dear Mrs. Brown, that one person should have all the bad servants, and another all the good?

Mrs. Brown. Not at all, if you give them high wages, and let them have their own way.

Mrs. Smith. Not their own way unless it is my way also. I assure you I am extremely particular; but then we are also very regular in our habits; and knowing myself that I dearly like to be praised when I do well, why I give praise to those about me when they deserve it.

Mrs. Brown. [*Rising, and with a Burleigh shake of the head.*] They won’t bear it.

Mrs. Smith. Oh, yes they will—do *try* just for three months with your next set of servants. But don’t go yet; here come the “trots” from their walk—you must see them.

Enter SUSAN and the children; the latter laden with hedge-flowers. MRS. BROWN admires and caresses the children, whom SUSAN, at her mistress’s bidding, has left in the drawing-room. MRS. BROWN says something about “spoiling,” which KATEY does not understand, though she opens her large eyes still wider, as if in the effort to comprehend. Kitchens in Victoria-terrace not being very remote from drawing-rooms, a sound of bitter violent weeping is heard proceeding from the lower regions.

MRS. SMITH *rushes to the stairs to ask what is the matter*; MRS. BROWN *following, in charge of the children*.

Sarah. [*Sympathetic, with her apron corner to her eye.*] Oh, ma'am, poor Susan has got a letter from home, and her sister that's been ill so long—that was in the hospital for months—is dying; the doctors say she can't live three days.

Mrs. Smith. [*Going into the kitchen.*] Oh, I am so sorry. Is it the poor girl that had the "house-maid's knee" from that hard place?

Sarah. Yes, ma'am; the brutes that kept her scrubbing from morning till night; I wonder they can't be hung for murder.

Mrs. Smith. Hush, Sarah; it will do no good to reproach them any more. No doubt they have learned a lesson from their severity, and will regret it as long as they live. [*To Susan—putting her hand kindly on her shoulder.*] My poor girl, what can I do to comfort you?

Susan. [*Sobbing violently.*] Oh, ma'am, she do so fret to see me once more! There's—only—a—a year between us; and we came up to London together.

Mrs. Smith. Then go to her, of course, by all means.

Susan. [*Sobbing still, and kissing one of Mrs. SMITH's hands.*] Oh, ma'am, I was afraid—Cook—being out—you couldn't let me; and if I don't go to-day I may never see her—again—O, ma'am, bless

you!—bless you!—ma'am. No one ever had such a mistress.

Mrs. Smith. Hush, my poor girl; try to be calm—she may recover still—doctors often make mistakes—and if not, remember it is the will of God—and think how much your poor sister suffered. Sarah, fetch her a glass of wine, and then look for “Bradshaw”—it is in the breakfast-room—that we may see when the next train to Reading goes. That is the one she wants, is it not?

[*Exit SARAH, who returns with “Bradshaw” and a glass of wine. SUSAN revives a little. “Bradshaw” declares there is a mixed train 1 h. 55 m.; Mrs. SMITH observes there is only just time to arrange, as there is a long omnibus ride to the station. SUSAN shakes her head at the mention of dinner, and Mrs. SMITH suggests to SARAH a packet of sandwiches to put into the traveller’s bag. WILLY and KATEY promise to be very good with dear mamma, and kiss “poor” SUSAN — little lips trembling with the ready sobs.*

* * * * *

SUPPLEMENTARY SCENE.—No. 5. Mr. and Mrs. BROWN, anathematising mutton-chops cooked (?) by charwoman.

Mr. Brown. [*Crossly.*] Mrs. B., as my mother, who was a Norfolk woman, used to say, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating;” and I do maintain Smith’s is the pleasantest house I know to go to: *he* never sits down to a dinner of fat and cinders, I

know—and what does it signify if she spoils the servants, if she gets the best sort of work out of them nevertheless. I never saw plate so polished—and *they've* no man. As for the spring-soup, the other day, it was fit for an alderman; and in the winter, that venison I shall never forget—why can't ~~we~~ have hot-water plates I should like to know.

Mrs. Brown. Brown, you are quite a brute to talk of such things at such a time—when you know I am almost frantic.

Mr. Brown. I am not a brute; but this I do say, that the *young* wives seem to me in the main the best managers.

Mrs. Brown. You had better bury me—I shall soon be worried into my grave—and then you can have a young wife.

Mr. Brown. Don't talk like an old fool. Hang it—it is enough to make a man savage. Scold, scold, scold—change, change, change.

Mrs. Brown. [*Weeping.*] Because I get hold of a parcel of wretches, and Mrs. Smith has treasures.

Mr. Brown. I fancy she helps to make them treasures; and it isn't as if she could be very active in the house herself—I am sure she isn't; such a charming accomplished woman—the life and ornament of society, and as pretty——

Mrs. BROWN bursts into a fit of hysterics. Mr. BROWN acknowledges he is a brute, calls her "darling," and "dear Nancy," and the scene closes on mutual flatteries and condolence, Mr. B. promising never to set up Mrs. SMITH as a pattern again.

MISS BRIGHTINGTON'S POLKA JACKET;

OR,

SUSAN BENNETT'S CHRISTMAS DAY, 1845.

"MOTHER, there's only Mrs. MacDingaway's plaid cotton-velvet dress to finish, and the young lady, her companion's, tarlatan muslin to make, and Miss Brightington's blue body to sew on," said Susan Bennett, a pretty little dressmaker, who had just set up in the aristocratic suburb of Islington. "I shall get finished by Christmas-eve," she added, "and shall have time to make you the new cap, and put the flounce upon my own brown merino."

Alas! for the vanity of human expectations. Napoleon foresaw not the frosts and snows of Russia; and Susan Bennett did not know the colder elements of envy and selfishness that were to chill her heart on Christmas-day. The eve came, and, basket in hand, the little dressmaker tripped along. The ponderous velvet, of vast dimensions, and the freezing muslin, were safely delivered; and now came the

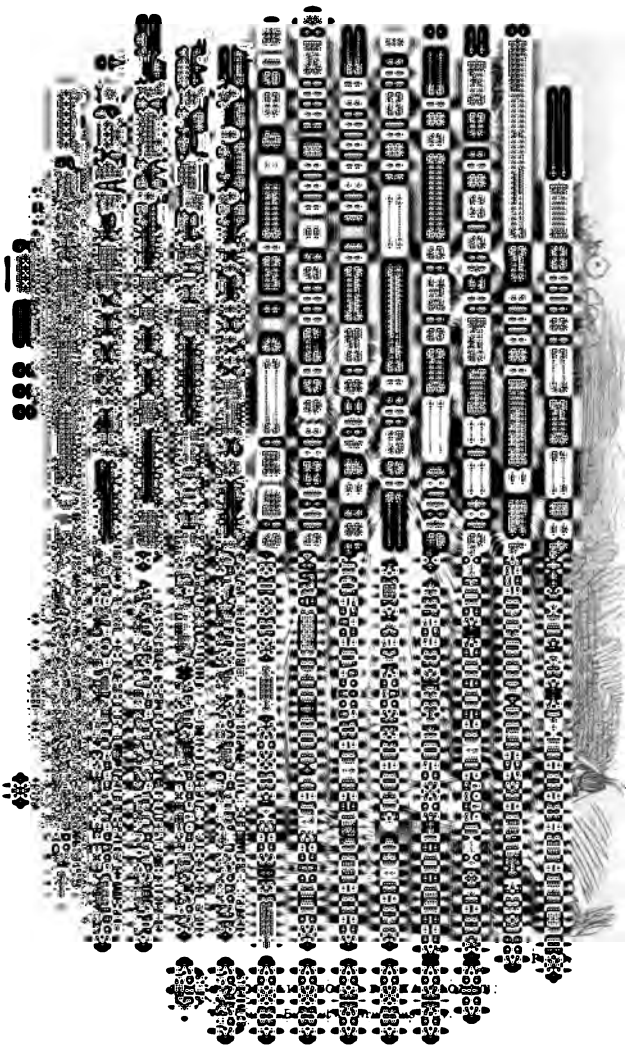
delicate blue silk, for the only daughter and sole heiress of a retired stockbroker, but one who would not give her a guinea for dower while he lived. Here Susan was desired to walk in ; and then she was told to walk up into the snug and comfortable dressing-room of that elderly young lady, for Miss Brightington was thirty, or thereabouts. Not that I would hint that there is any impeachment of the moral character in being thirty, or that it is even a legal crime, which might be quite another thing, or even that parties acknowledging such a fact are amenable to any obsolete law ; but, unhappily, Miss Brightington made herself ridiculous, by behaving *à la* seventeen, and was afflicted with a shortness of memory quite deplorable. She could not remember the Queen's accession—not a bit—and had only a vague idea of being taken to see the illuminations on the auspicious event of her Majesty's marriage ; adding, of course, that "children always like such things."

Miss Brightington also ascended into the warm dressing-room, and, combining the expression of an injured individual with as much dignity as was compatible with the feet-upon-fender-and-fire-screen-in-hand attitude she adopted, she spoke to the trembling Susan, who saw that something was wrong, but could not tell what, seeing that the new dress was yet to be tried, and she did believe it would fit "beautifully."

"I could not have believed such a thing," said

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the lady, taking the dress in her hand with something very like a snatch. (N.B. To snatch is not dignified.)

"What have I done wrong, ma'am?" said Susan, meekly; "I have made it exactly as you ordered."

"As I ordered, indeed! But haven't you made Miss Clatterworth's green satin with a POLKA JACKET?"

Susan admitted the fact.

"And she is to dine here to-morrow! Do you suppose I'll wear this thing?" And the irate lady threw the dress from her.

"I think it looks so nice, ma'am," said Susan, holding it out in the most attractive manner; "and it's just the make you thought so becoming."

"Thought—three months ago! I tell you what it is, you must take it back, and make me a Polka Jacket by five o'clock to-morrow."

"It's Christmas-day!" exclaimed the now tearful dressmaker.

"Well, I know it is. I want it for the Christmas party. No harm in working, I am sure, if there is no harm in playing forfeits, and all that."

"I must make quite a new body: I must sit up all-night to do it."

"Oh, nonsense! you people always say that; if you won't do it, somebody else will," returned the lady; and assuming the air of a patroness, she continued—"I did think, after all I had done for you, I should have met with a little gratitude! but there's

no such thing in the world, *I* believe." And doubtless she spoke from personal experience.

Poor simple-hearted Susan was quite overpowered by the charge of ingratitude ; and not clearly understanding that all she had to be grateful to Miss Brightington for, was, being allowed to work for her cheaper and better than that distinguished individual could find any one else to do, she would, at the moment, have consented to make Polka Jackets for a hundred days and nights to escape from it.

Now poor little Susan had a thorough woman's heart. Not one, however, at all like that of a fashionable *belle*, with all its glow and glory worn off by countless flirtations. Nor did she a bit resemble the class of "strong-minded" women who despise dress and all such appurtenances, who wouldn't be handsome if they could—not they—and who yet feel a natural antipathy to those afflicted with the gift of beauty, albeit so despised by them. For ourselves, we would not give a pin for a woman who had not just enough of a natural kind of fascinating desire to please, which teaches her how to put on a shawl or a bonnet in the most effective manner. Now Susan Bennett had precisely the right quantity of this feminine talent ; and it was not only the flounce to her own dress that she wanted to prepare against the coming day—there were half-a-dozen *et ceteras* of the toilet that seemed urgent necessities ere she could appear at a certain Christmas party, which she had looked

forward to, with the eagerness of those who taste few pleasures, for many a week.

Who could it be before whom she wished to appear charming? Not, surely, her grandmother, who, by the way, was yet young enough to make a plum-pudding, and to enjoy the same; not her uncles and aunts, and the juvenile sprouts, whose numbers seemed legion. Though, if she had been asked to make out a list of the Christmas guests expected to meet at uncle Tom's, the chances are she would have left out a certain merry-hearted young watchmaker, who always said "everything was for the best"—or at any rate she would have named him last, with a sort of "Oh, I forgot cousin Robert."

The little dressmaker had talked of sitting up all night; but there came a recollection of red eyes and pale cheeks consequent upon such freaks; so to bed she went, meaning to rise at four in the morning. But alas! she could not sleep, or if for a moment she lost consciousness, she dreamt of cousin Robert making love to somebody in a horrible Polka Jacket. So up she rose on the bitter Christmas morning at three of the clock, and kindled a few cinders to keep her from quite shivering, and by the light of a thin candle set about her task.

We wonder what Miss Arabella Brightington was dreaming of just then!

The tabby cat rubbed against Susan's foot, as if asking for a saucer of milk; she was used to a

candle-light breakfast sometimes, and did not know the hour. But she must wait as well as her mistress—no milk in the streets yet for hours.

See, daylight is breaking! And hark! there's a shrill young voice pouring out a Christmas carol. Foolish Susan; the tears are dropping upon your work: what is the reason—not that merry carol surely? Do tears stain blue silk? We cannot positively tell; but judging from circumstantial evidence should say *not*. At any rate she dashes them away, because—she has not time to fret. The mother must make her own cap—that's certain; and finely she fusses about it! Susan shows her how, and might almost as well have done it entirely.

Noon comes; no chance of the flounce on her own gown—that hope is abandoned entirely. Thread breaks, needles snap, and pins drop out in the most rebellious manner imaginable. Susan is getting nervous, her fingers tremble, and she sees, with prophetic truth, she must also give up going to the three o'clock dinner; this is worse than giving up the flounce; but there's no help for it—the Polka Jacket cannot be done.

The mother talks of staying at home to bear her company; but as Susan justly says, "What's the use of that; especially as there's no dinner provided? She will have bread and cheese, and come to tea: sure to have some supper at uncle Tom's on Christmas-day."

The mother yields, though not without some

kindly regrets, to such potent reasonings; and the little dressmaker is left to her Christmas dinner of bread and cheese—and to work at the Polka Jacket. Once she goes to the window to see how the world looks outside. Flys and coaches rattle along; brisk pedestrians are smartly dressed; omnibuses look gayer than usual; and a remarkably bright fire shines from the opposite house. Silly Susan! tears again! they only hinder your work, and will make your eyes quite as red as a wakeful night would do.

Four o'clock! The Polka Jacket, with its pipings and linings, and buttons, completed at last. Half-a-mile to be carried home; but the little dressmaker almost flies along, and, extravagant creature, spends sixpence to ride back by omnibus—which crawls the distance.

Miss Brightington gloried in the Polka Jacket; especially as her rival did *not* wear hers; so that, after all, she might have spared poor Susan, without suffering very cruelly for it. Just as she was sitting down to her three courses, Susan Bennett was making her toilet to join the Christmas party at tea. The brown merino would really do very well without a flounce, and she had contrived to sew a bit of lace on the top, that being one of the most important of the *et ceteras*. She is locking the doors of the two rooms she and her mother occupy, but is so startled by a loud knock that the key drops out of her hand. Who can it be? Somebody opens the door, and the wind almost blows out Susan's candle, but it does

not quite; and she sees by the flickering light that cousin Robert springs two steps at a time up the stairs. For that matter, though, she knew his step without staying to look who it was.

"How kind of you to come for me!" exclaimed Susan.

"They wouldn't let me come before—at least they began laughing and quizzing. I hate to be quizzed; don't you?"

"Yes," murmured Susan, in the faintest of treble notes; but somehow or other her cousin heard the word, and by this time they were out in the street.

"How cold it is!" said Robert.

"Yes—no; yes, it is cold."

"Cold! why your hand is like ice! There, wrap the other in your cloak; I'll keep this warm."

"Robert! let go! What nonsense!"

"I will, I say." But the remainder of that conference is sacred.

"What a time you must have kept Robert!" said the grandmother.

"She was not quite ready," he answered for her. True, she had the key to pick up and one door to lock, and—they had come a long way round. There was a little quizzing after the cousins arrived, but they did not seem to mind it much. People don't when they have a thorough understanding between themselves.

Though Susan had had no dinner, she ate very

little supper ; and yet she could not be ill—she had such a beautiful colour : but that might be from her long walk. Certainly nobody would have thought she had sat up half the night, and been weeping half the morning. Cousin Robert, notwithstanding his gaiety, had always been a bit of a philosopher ; he said the works of the clocks and watches made him think, and, as we have said before, his favourite maxim was “all is for the best.” He is going into business for himself very soon ; but he must have told Susan something more than that in their long walk, or she never would have agreed with him that it was “all for the best” that he had fetched her, and consequently that she had had to stay at home and make Miss Brightington's POLKA JACKET !

A STORY OF WAYS AND MEANS.

CHAPTER I.

IN their dull, dim parlour Mrs. Hargrave and her daughter were seated, Caroline on a footstool by her mother's side. The house was in one of those grey-looking streets which abound in London, though many a denizen of the metropolis little heeds their existence. Branching indirectly from, and therefore generally parallel with, some great thoroughfare, they are thoroughfares themselves, but threaded so little as such that the fact is almost forgotten, till the necessary (or unnecessary) nuisance of a paving perplexity breaks up the high road, dams up the stream of traffic, and sends its rushing tide of vehicles, for days or weeks together, down the "quiet street," waking its slumbering echoes with a ceaseless roar, breaking the nightly repose of its inhabitants, and working a revolution in its local customs. But the street I mean was distinguished by a further peculiarity from the general class to which it belonged. It was an artist-street, the sign thereof being that

here and there a window, as if regardless of the symmetry of outward appearance, soared upwards, apparently ambitious of communicating with its neighbour over head. And Mr. Hargrave was a painter—one of a band so numerous that no one can fancy in the description of him that an individual is sketched. A man of talent—not genius—with more aspiration than power, and imbued with that selfish, self-willed egotism which, though it may sometimes overshadow a great mind, much oftener dwarfs to still narrower dimensions, and shrivels up a little one.

I have said it was a dull, dim parlour, but not a dirty or dingy one; for neatness and cleanliness were as apparent as the shabbiness of the furniture. If curtains and chair-covers were faded, it was from washing as well as from wear. Poverty reigned there with his iron sceptre, and his heel on all the flowers of life; but he wore a mask—half pride, half resignation—and his aspect was less repellant than it often is when his rule is far less cruel and despotic. The first floor of the house was occupied by the artist as a studio. There pictures were painted which did or did not bring golden returns; there patrons—the few he had—were received; and there he indulged his dreams of future fame and appreciation, railing at the dulness of the multitude because it failed to call him great, and—in one sense happily for himself—wrapping himself in his self-consciousness, as in a protecting garment of egotism, which shut out

all the vulgar cares of life. He little thought—and he could not have been made to comprehend—that his very selfishness was the barrier to true greatness. Intellect, knowledge, learning—a life-long practice in the mechanism of his art—all these he had; but he wanted the generous pulse of feeling which would have added a soul to the evidences of mind, and warmed with the heart-fire of genius his clever, cold creations.

He did not know—and he could not have been taught to comprehend—that the calm, patient, care-worn wife, deputed to the ignoble tasks of domestic drudgery; to the ingenious stratagems by which she strove to make one sovereign fulfil the legitimate services of two; and to painful interviews with pressing tradesmen when they begged the settlement long-standing accounts; had *acted* a finer poem in her forty years of life, than his brain had ever imagined, or his pencil executed. I have said that she and her daughter were seated in that dark parlour, but few would have guessed how occupied. The employment will appear little profitable, nay, perhaps on the contrary, it may seem to belong to the pomps and vanities of life. Briefly, then, by the mingled lights of winter twilight and a bright if not large fire, she was plaiting and braiding her daughter's rich dark hair. From Caroline's early childhood it had been the doting mother's pride; no other hand had ever tended it, from the days of the golden curls, through all their deepening shades, till now,

in its rich profusion, her hair was of that dark hue which looks black until sun-light or fire-light brings out its greater brilliance. Helpful in most things beyond the average of her age and condition, in one respect Caroline Hargrave was helpless to the last degree. Beyond gathering up her long hair with a comb, or parting it in thick locks when damp from its frequent bath, the maiden of sixteen had not a notion of arranging her greatest adornment. Deep and beautiful as was the mutual attachment of the mother and her only child, to my mind there was something touching in the phase of it I am describing. The symmetrical figure bursting into the perfection of its rounded beauty, was little likely to have gayer apparel than the home-made cotton gown; the little foot was commonly disguised in cheap and clumsy shoes; the small and well-shaped hand had never known a Parisian glove; and her fair young face and violet blue eyes had never been "set off" by the witchery of a "darling" bonnet. The coarsest straw, or dowdy combinations of mysterious manufacture were the only head-gear she had ever possessed—but the beautiful hair! that at least the mother could control, and limb-wearied or mind-wearied, early or late, some hour of the day she would surely find, in which with practised hand and loving gesture to wreath its wavy masses—one day in one fashion, the next in some other—till one might have thought variety itself was exhausted.

"Mamma," said Caroline, looking up with a

smile, and an expression of countenance that seemed a laughing contradiction to her words, "Mamma, do you know I am very vain of my hair!"

"Not vain, my love, I am sure," said Mrs. Hargrave, shaping, as she spoke, a massive plait like a coronet for the young head that leaned upon her knee. "Not vain, I am sure, though of course you know it is beautiful."

"Dear mamma! cannot you tell what I mean?" exclaimed Caroline; "that I must have been deaf or blind last night, not to discover how beautifully you had dressed it. Really, I felt what Lady Fitzroy said was quite true, that no lady's in the room looked so well as mine. And I thought how kind and how clever my dear mamma was; and how much I wished she had been there to hear her tasteful work admired." And Caroline kissed the hand that was conveniently near her lips.

"Ah, I have been so busy all the morning, that you have not told me half the particulars of the ball yet—your first ball, too. Did you really enjoy it, my darling?"

"Oh yes; was it not kind of Miss Graham to invite me?"

Now Miss Graham was what might be called a young old maid, rich and generous, good and clever, and handsome enough to make a very handsome portrait, for the which she had recently sat to Mr. Hargrave. The painter despised with most supreme contempt that branch of his art, by which alone a

twenty-pound note was likely to find its way into his house; and had he suspected that his sifter really cared very little whether the portrait were a likeness or not, and merely thus employed him, as a delicate manner of benefiting his wife and daughter, it is probable contempt and indignation would have prevented him from undertaking the commission. Yet such was the truth; and when to this trait of her character is added the fact that a week before the ball she sent Caroline, with the prettiest of notes, a quantity of Indian muslin, begging her acceptance of the same, saying, that she had received a present of several pieces from a cousin in the East (so she had seven years ago), and leaving her to suppose this was one of them, though really purchased that morning at Howell's—when this second trait of character is perceived, and understood, the discriminating reader will be intimately acquainted with the shrewd, generous, rather eccentric, but very high-hearted Emily Graham.

“Tell me,” continued Mrs. Hargrave, recalling to her mind, as it were a picture, the figure of her young daughter as she had appeared the night before in her filmy, floating muslin robe, and her rich dark hair, without either the addition or adornment of a gem or a flower—“tell me,” she continued, “did you dance much, and who was it that found you partners?”

“Miss Graham herself,” said Caroline, “and not only did she introduce me to partners, but to several

ladies who were there, calling me her 'young friend ;'—was not this kind and considerate ? And do you know, I liked better to talk to them than to the strange gentlemen. The latter asked me about operas, and theatres, and books I had never read, and I could only say, 'I don't know' to all that was said. And then I felt confused, and that made me seem sillier than ever."

"But the ladies," said Mrs. Hargrave, with a smile, "praised your hair, and so you felt at home in the discourse,—was that it Caroline?"

"Dear mamma, can you think me so foolish ? The ladies talked to me about many things, and when I seemed ignorant, enlightened me. I did not feel confused at all with them, and I can hardly tell how it came about that Lady Fitzroy admired my hair, and called her daughter to observe its arrangement, recommending her to describe the style to her French maid Annette."

"Then I suppose we shall have the honour of establishing a fashion, my child."

"I do not think so," replied Caroline, "for the young lady shook her head, and said 'that if her maid could dress hair with half the simple grace that mine displayed, she might soon make a fortune at no other employment.'"

Mrs. Hargrave was twining the last loose tress round her fingers while Caroline spoke, and the daughter did not remark that she paused a moment, dropping her hands at that instant on the young

girl's shoulder. Then quickly completing her self-appointed task, the mother stooped to kiss the smooth fair brow before her, and dismissed her child with one of those fond words which fall like sweet music on a loving heart.

CHAPTER II.

THE scene is again the parlour in the "quiet street;" but three years have passed, and, busy as old Time must have been about more important matters, he had condescended to leave there agreeable evidences of his passage. The room was no longer dim and dull; on the contrary, it wore a decided air of substantial comfort. Instead of worn and faded chintz, thick curtains of a plain but serviceable manufacture kept out the wintry air; a warm carpet felt soft to the feet; an easy-chair stretched out its inviting arms on one side of the fire, whilst on the other a comfortable couch extended its length. Nor was the room without ornament. Opposite to the chimney-glass, and reflected therein so that the picture seemed always present, was a beautiful portrait of Caroline Hargrave—in truth, one of her father's most successful productions. Representing her simply attired in white, it recalled precisely her appearance on the eventful night of her first ball; and at the moment

of which we are speaking the original was not by, to invite comparisons.

Mrs. Hargrave was seated on the couch, and beside her was a gentleman—a young man of three or four and twenty, who, though deeply interested in the conversation which was going on, and looking withal remarkably happy, yet raised his eyes every now and then either to the portrait or its reflection, as if it were the presiding deity of the place. Although three years had passed, so far from the lady looking older the case was absolutely the reverse; a truth which was the more apparent from the circumstance of her being much better dressed than before—wearing on this occasion a quiet and matronly dress of dark satin. Her habitual expression now was one of repose and contentment; but at this moment it was lighted by a visible, half-tearful gladness, and yet ruffled by some feeling that partook of anxiety.

“Why will you,” exclaimed Wilton Bromley—for we will take up their discourse at the minute when, Asmodeus-like, we look in—“why will you, my dear lady, revert to what you are pleased to call the inequality of our station? I will admit it only to be inequality of fortune; and I am so eccentric as to think this an inequality which renders us peculiarly well suited to each other. Dearly as I love Caroline, were I penniless it would be a sorry subject to speak of our marriage; and were she rich, I should distrust the power of my moderate income—

should feel there were something wrong in our relative positions—should despair of ever knowing the exquisite sensation, the thought that, even in the most worldly sense, and in reference to mere material comforts, her future lot promises to be brighter and easier than her past."

Mrs. Hargrave pressed his hand, and said with emotion, "You are all that is good and generous."

"And what can be really a richer inheritance," the young man continued, "than health, talent, and beauty? If an artist be fit companion for our nobles, surely his daughter may mate with a simple gentleman."

"A really great artist!" murmured Mrs. Hargrave, as if half ashamed of the insinuation her words conveyed, and yet determined to speak the truth.

"I am no connoisseur," said Wilton; "nor is this the time to discuss Mr. Hargrave's talents. If," he added, with a smile, "I do not always award him the pinnacle he assumes for himself, I cannot deny him very great talents; and even by the vulgar and often false measure of success he may be tried, since his art has provided honourable and comfortable sustenance for his family, and has educated a daughter to be the paragon I think her."

"Suppose he has not done this?" said Mrs. Hargrave, looking down and playing with the fringe of her apron.

"How!" returned Wilton; "then he has a

private fortune, which for his sake, but for that alone, I rejoice to learn."

"Not so. Is it possible Miss Graham has never hinted at a means of income not apparent to the world in general?"

"Now you mention it, she once hinted at some secret, calling it a gold mine, and speaking in as mysterious a manner as if she were setting me an enigma to guess. Having no talent for that sort of thing it passed from my mind; but now that you recal the circumstance, I do recollect that she clearly intimated that it was something which redounded to your honour, and that if when I discovered the fact I should not think so, I should deserve to lose Caroline, whom she would immediately endeavour to console, and provide with a worthier lover."

"Noble-hearted woman!"

"Yes, noble-hearted, and right-minded is she," returned Wilton Bromley; "and of this I am sure, that whatever she approved must have been noble and right; wise too and prudent, it is very likely, in that lower sense of wisdom and prudence to which the greatest wisdom is not of necessity allied; for Miss Graham's enthusiasm is always joined to the practical genius of common sense. So, dear lady, either gratify the curiosity you have piqued or leave the riddle still unsolved, if so it please you."

"My heart allows me no choice; for a mean

deception, carefully planned, seems to me but the ill-favoured twin of a bold falsehood. Not that there is pain in telling *you* the truth; the trial was to tell my husband."

"A mystery to him, too—wonder on wonder!"

"For a time even to him; but listen, and I will sketch the history of my married life in a few sentences. I married early, with but a small fortune, besides the riches of hope and youth. We loved each other, at least my husband loved—still loves—me as well as a vain man and an egotist is capable of loving. But I saw not his faults then, and bitter—bitter indeed was the knowledge of them when it came. Taking his dreams of fame and fortune for solid expectations, I saw my little property consumed without much anxiety; nor did I know for long how much it was really diminished.

"Suddenly the blow fell; three years after our marriage, and when Caroline was an infant in my arms, I learned that we were penniless. I do not believe it possible that they who have never known poverty can be made to understand what the struggle of life really is—forgive me if I say this even to you," and she pressed Wilton Bromley's hand as she spoke; "if they could be taught this knowledge, it would be, I think, the most beneficial revelation the human race could receive. The cares which depress till they degrade; the necessity of money seeking, until the jaundiced eye sees even earth's noblest things by its own false medium; the

withering of the heart's best qualities for want of the power of exercising them; the writhing under petty obligations, writhing because they are so gracelessly conferred nine times out of ten; the serfdom of the very soul whose thoughts even are not free."

"Believe me, I can realise all this," said Wilton, with much feeling.

"You think you can, as a thousand other generous natures have said and thought: but I tell you there is a new sense comes to us with this sort of suffering, but a sense that vibrates only to its own agony. The rich may comprehend the condition of the helpless, abject poor, the utterly destitute, but of the yet deeper trials of the *struggling* they know but little more than can a blind man know of sight even by the most vivid description, and with the strongest human sympathy."

"This life of suffering was mine," she continued, when tears had relieved the bitterness of her recollections, "for years, many years; mine, I say, rather than ours; for, wrapped in his own dreams, Mr. Hargrave scarcely shared them. But amid all I had one joy, my only child, my Caroline. It was my aim to keep her heart uncorroded by worldly cares, and the bitterness of poverty; I did this, and in the very doing my own soul escaped at intervals from its corruption. In one respect my husband's abstraction and isolation worked well. I took care that discourses about money, about poverty, should

not meet her ear. Until the age of sixteen I educated her myself, for I was able, with the help of books, to do this; although when I attempted to make my poor acquirements serviceable as a daily teacher, I found younger and abler instructors very naturally preferred. Perhaps a mother's love quickened my abilities; at all events thus it was. At sixteen Caroline went to her first ball; you remember the night?"

"How well! Never has her image been entirely driven from my heart from that hour; though for a while absence and travel perhaps weakened the impression. It was long before I recognised the real nature of my feelings, but I now know that in that girlish grace—see, mamma! it is beaming down upon us now"—and he pointed to the picture—"and almost childish simplicity, I met my destiny. What a beautiful portrait it is. Her father has caught just the expression she wore; too innocent of evil to be frightened, too pure and graceful to be *gauche*, her natural timidity had a fascination about it beyond all words to describe. I remember comparing her to a white dove whose wings had strayed among the peacocks of an aviary: and then her beautiful hair!—oh, I had no comparison for that."

"You thought it beautifully dressed," said Mrs Hargrave, with a tearful smile.

"I don't know how it was dressed," said Wilton, adding, with the most charming ignorance of the mysteries of the toilet, "it did not seem arranged at

all; the beauty of it was, it looked so natural—as it always does!”

“You know I always dress Caroline’s hair?”

“Yes, I have heard her say so. What is to be done when I take her away? I must absolutely apprentice a maid to you, to be instructed in the art!”

“I think you had better: the idea, I assure you, is not in the least absurd. I would take her without a fee—that would be the only point not quite *en règle*.”

“Good Heavens! what do you mean? No, surely—a light is breaking on me!”

“I mean the admiration excited on the occasion you mention first gave me the idea of turning my talent for hair-dressing to profitable account. A talent originating in a mother’s love and pride—though perhaps assisted by opportunities and accidents likely enough to surround an artist’s wife. The naturalness you observed seems to be the secret of my success, and the particular by which I am distinguished from the herd of *coiffeurs*. A day or two after Caroline’s first ball I called on Miss Graham, mentioned the idea which had flashed upon my mind, received her instant sympathy and approbation—and more than this, her introductions were the stepping-stones to my fortune.”

“Fortune!”

“Yes, fortune; at least, in comparison with our former poverty such it has been, to make twenty

guineas a-week in the London season, besides receiving fees from ladies'-maids and others merely to be allowed to look on while I operated. And out of the season, I am perpetually being sent for into the country, and well paid for my time and trouble. These are the "ways and means" which have paid my husband's debts; have surrounded us with every needful comfort; and have given Caroline for two years the benefit of the best masters in every branch of her education. Wilton Bromley will not despise his wife's mother for having practised so very humble a branch of art."

"He will love and honour her the more," said Wilton, pressing her in his arms—"that is, if further love and reverence from him be possible. No wonder with such a mother Caroline is peerless. But say, what did you mean by it being 'a trial' to tell your husband this history, which to me seems beautiful."

"He has a different pride from yours."

"And now that the results are so fortunate and evident?" asked Bromley.

"The subject is never mentioned between us—he acts as if the thing were not. But let me ring now, and send for Caroline—she has longed for days past that I should tell you the Great Secret!"

A

TALE THAT WAS TOLD TO ME.

“Restore the Dead thou Sea.”

MRS. HEMANS.

AMID all the scenes of strange adventures, dauntless daring, appalling dangers, and unimagined perils, I believe every one, from the idiosyncrasy of his own mind, finds a peculiar interest in some one particular range of subjects; and it may be that the eagerness with which we read or listen when such scenes are described is the evidence of a taste which, with over-indulgence, would grow morbid, or of an enthusiasm quite capable of becoming extravagant. I confess to such a weakness myself. I can listen with comparative calmness to the most exciting narratives of all land expeditions and adventures, whether they include an Alpine ascent or an encounter with banditti; a lonely march on the wild Prairie, or the passage of a caravan across the scorched and scorching Desert. But directly the wanderer lifts his foot from the dry land, and trusts himself to the slumbering OCEAN, a new train of feelings has birth,

and the interest in a stranger's safety quickens into something really approaching personal sensation.

Let the red earth of battle-fields proclaim trumpet-tongued *their* story, and the trampled human clay rise up in judgment to bear it witness. The tale is blazoned on history's page through the long course of the rolling centuries; the courage of action always, and—of endurance some times. But the glittering tinsel wreath of glory often only hides the ghastly Moloch-idol war; and I am dull at perceiving the subordinate heroism whose leading spring is mean ambition, avarice, or hate. Such heroism, too, finds always a chronicler; but ocean is for the most part the keeper of its dread secrets, and only from the faint breath which now and then floats across the waves may we guess at the human agonies the remorseless waters have at once created and extinguished! Perhaps it is this vagueness—this certainty that stranger tales remain untold than any which rumour has caught and echoed—which lends so strong an interest to stories of shipwreck or disasters at sea, appealing to the unsatisfied imagination until it aches with the realisation of the scene. And yet what deeds of self-denial and noble self-devotion *are* registered and stand forth in their lovely radiance, to redeem and vindicate mankind; alas, beside those awful revelations of brute selfishness to which it would seem that inferior natures are reduced in the hour of imminent peril! But this is a long introduction to "the tale that was told to me."

There were more passengers on board the good ship Falcon than I should care to number. Many were young, and for the most part buoyant with hope, as became the living freight of the "outward-bound."

India is not looked upon exactly as it was even twenty years ago. People are not quite sure that gold is to be picked up there for the stooping, or that diamonds are showered down at the feet of Europeans; but still there is a prevalent notion, vague enough sometimes, that fortune is more easily wooed beneath the orient heavens than under that soberer sky which canopies the spot of earth called England—a spot, indeed, rising from the blue waters just large enough to be a throne whence delegates are sent to rule the world, and to which her children-wanderers look up with loving loyalty. Well is it that youth is prone to build its fairy castles, and does *not* dream of early death, or lingering, life-sapping disease, or of enervated mind—the irremediable penalties too often paid for all that the tropics can give. And so the ardent cadet has more often a vision of knighthood and crosses of honour than of "sick leave" and blighted hopes; and the merchant thinks less of an arid and forgotten grave than of returning in manhood's prime with the gold that he teaches his heart shall recompense love for its long and lonely martyrdom.

Among the passengers of the Falcon, however, was one not exactly belonging to the usual category

of outward-bound adventurers. Mr. Francis Rayton had made his fortune in India, and that in a very few years. He was something under forty, and had suffered less from the climate than most English residents in Calcutta. Nevertheless, his physicians had recommended the long sea-voyage in preference to the overland journey, since it was absolutely necessary that he should return for a few months to wind-up mercantile affairs in which tens of thousands of pounds were involved. His active, energetic mind demurred at this decision for awhile; yet he gave way, for health had never seemed so precious as now that fortune had made hope reality, and all the beautiful things of life were opening to him. Francis Rayton was not a common character; and eagerly, almost greedily, as he had sought wealth, he had never sought it as an end.

Caroline Smythe was a girl of twenty, the daughter of a general officer, going out under the protection of a widowed friend, to join her parents. She had the beauty of youth, and a little beauty besides; with all the pride of what the Spaniards call "blue blood," and that pride, in addition, which I never yet found wanting in a soldier's daughter. She would not have married a merchant if life and death had hung in the balance, for she would not have suffered her own heart to touch the beam; but she was a coquette to that heart's core, and Francis Rayton was by far the handsomest and most intellectual man on board the *Falcon*. How was it pos-

sible she could refuse to gratify the chief *besoin* of her existence?

Helen Seymour was making the voyage without other protection than that of the blunt but kind-hearted captain. Perhaps she did not require any at all. She was not very young; sometimes she looked about five-and-twenty, at others you would have taken her for thirty at least. She was neither handsome nor beautiful—far less could she have been called pretty; that term would have seemed at once a something too much and too little to award her. Yet she was not plain. Her figure was good, she had a small, white, well-shaped hand, and most people thought she had a “nice” face; but few knew the expression which, when happy or animated, beamed through her eyes, flushed in her cheek, and quivered round her lips. Few, because happiness had been doled out to her most scantily, and she was not of that lucky temperament which can find excitement in trifles. Helen had already outlived her nearest relations, and she was poor; going out to India to educate the children of a second cousin, who entertained the romantic notion of bringing them up in one of the healthier northern settlements instead of following the commoner plan, and tearing her own heart-strings by sending them to England.

Two more individuals will complete the cluster it is necessary to describe. James Lawson had been for some years a confidential clerk or agent to Mr. Rayton, and was now going out to be left in a

situation of considerable trust in the Calcutta establishment. His wife and infant child were with him; and as they made home of any spot of earth, he did not pretend to sentimental regrets at leaving his native land for a long and indefinite period. The young couple had struggled through the early trials of poverty; and their affection had previously been tested by absence and a long engagement; but now, after three years of wedded happiness, and bright fortune shining steadily in the horizon, life seemed something more precious, more soul-satisfying than even youthful dreams had pictured it. The Lawsons were quiet and retiring in their deportment; for, with a feeling which has quite as much pride as humility in it, they were conscious that they were only recently lifted a step or two in society. But Helen Seymour had an intuitive knowledge of character; and knowing them very speedily, could not help being interested. Scarcely cultivated enough in mind to be congenial companions to her, she yet honoured them most truly, and in witnessing their affection felt as if something in which she had before half blindly believed was now made known to her. There was a manly tenderness in his behaviour towards his wife, as far removed from lover-like adulation as it was deeper in its springs and dearer to her heart—manly, for that same tenderness, the very exhalation of true heart love, is an attribute that never does emanate from the vain, selfish egotist; or the frivolous butterfly of the world; or

from the not more manly slave of his own ardent passions. And then, on little Fanny's part—for she was a little creature, and looked up to him literally as well as figuratively—the entire devotion, and perfect, unbroken, unclouded confidence, were something beautiful to witness; and with the constant ministering of each to the other, made up a spectacle the most delightful in the world to the quick eye of the poet-philosopher; and Helen, however humble in the ranks, yet, like many others who have never “penned their inspirations,” belonged to that class.

It would fill a volume to detail, scene by scene, how intimacies were formed between some of the parties I have named. Amid the nearly incessant occupation of his past life, Mr. Rayton had had very little opportunity of mixing in female society, or perhaps that with which he had met in India had not been sufficiently attractive to induce him to make opportunities and cultivate it. Even while in London business had pressed so heavily upon him, that some of his oldest and most valued friends he had neglected to visit. But life on board the *Falcon*, where at least no post came in or went out, was comparative leisure; and he was hardly sensible how much of that leisure was in reality filled up by conversation with Helen Seymour. Some mysterious affinity of feeling and opinion seemed to have drawn them together; and yet there were two or three of her attributes against which he had entertained a positive prejudice. For instance, he had always

thought politics quite out of the scope of a woman's reasoning; yet when he found Helen's mind familiar with the great truths of humanity—those truths to the exposition of which his ardent yet half secret ambition lured him—the earnestness of life, and the thousand topics which must branch from such conclusions, he could not but acknowledge, though not without surprise, that her sympathy and companionship were none the less delightful because she was a woman.

It was not in a coquette's nature to look calmly on while the object she had selected for a flirtation showed an evident preference for an "old maidish" rival. Caroline certainly knew nothing of politics beyond having been taught to scorn, with all the hate of ignorance the very party to which Rayton belonged; if, indeed, one of so wide and comprehensive a mind could have narrowed itself to the jealousies which seem inseparable from party-feeling or connexion. But she had a trick of appealing to him for information, and throwing herself on his forbearance, in that pretty, confiding, feminine manner, that is by no means without its fascination; and it was not easy to meet the glance of her soft large hazel eyes, as with a toss of her head she threw back her clustering ringlets, and make acknowledgments at the same moment of any mental deficiencies. Caroline had nothing in the past but school-girl days—and her numerous conquests—to remember, and the present seemed made to enjoy

according to her fleeting inclinations. Helen had felt, and seen, and suffered—had *lived* all her past, and for the future was brave to endure and high principled to act. Francis Rayton stood between a good and an evil genius, and had he questioned his own heart he would have discovered the fact. But he did not do so—he had always looked on love as an episode in a man's life, and one that should only be indulged in on a proper occasion. Now this occasion he had for years been accustomed to consider his final settlement in England: and so he suffered himself to be swayed by the impulse of the moment, and what is so very foolishly called chance.

Weeks had passed—they expected to touch at the Cape in a day or two.

"Pray take my arm for a turn on deck this delicious evening," said Mr. Rayton, approaching Helen, who was standing near one of the lady passengers. Helen never sought any particular attention from him, but perhaps she did not quite conceal that it gave her pleasure to receive it.

"I never beheld so beautiful a sky," she exclaimed, pointing to the horizon, where the moon was rising, like an orb of gold, out of the dark waters. "And the sea," she continued, "slumbering like a gentle friend, instead of the cruel tyrant which we know an hour might make it."

"Nay," said Rayton, "do not let us think of storms and danger. Our voyage has hitherto been so prosperous, and I have such faith in the

Falcon, that I do not suffer myself to dream of disasters."

"You speak with all the confidence of an old voyager," replied Helen, smiling; "but beyond a steam-boat excursion of a day or two, this is my first acquaintance with 'blue-water,' and I am not yet sure how far I confide in it."

This allusion to steam-boat excursions led to reminiscences of Helen's continental travel; and though she had often spoken on the subject before, to Rayton's ear there always seemed something new to tell, for she described scenes he had ardently longed to visit. Possibly some vague notion crept into his mind that she would be a charming companion amid the ruins of empires; in the galleries of art; or wherever the spirit of poetry hovered. Talking of Art led—I cannot tell how, though it often does—to the subject of love; and Helen spoke with the frankness of a true-hearted woman, who was far too honest to feign either indifference or ignorance of the theme. And so they conversed earnestly, not flippantly, on the great lottery of life, from which so few prizes and so many blanks are drawn—or rather, over which some evil destiny presides to mismatch the assorted pairs. It might be fancy, but each thought there was a slight quiver in the voice of the other, and a modulation that made the tone different from that of ordinary discourse. There was something, too, in the solemn grandeur of the moon-lit ocean that well-accorded

with the sentiment which ruled the hour; for if the loveliness of nature fails among coarser clay to awaken the loftiest sympathies of humanity, its contemplation always "feeds the flame" where once it is kindled. Again Francis Rayton and Helen Seymour spoke of tempest and shipwreck; but now the theme was blended with stories of heroism and devotion, and of the loving hearts that had gone down together. Even Rayton—the busy money-winner, the man of the world—though capable of deeper sentiment and purer passion than he himself was aware—acknowledged that there might be cases in which such a death would be sweeter than all life could give to the solitary survivor.

"Of this I am sure," he exclaimed, "that the impulse of the moment, while it ruled the conduct, would be the test of the heart's affection."

Was it impulse, or accident, or absence of mind, that made him press for an instant, almost with an interlacing of the fingers, the ungloved hand which rested on his arm!

On the second finger of that hand Helen constantly wore a beautiful emerald ring, nearly the only ornament of value which had been remarked about her, and which she had on one occasion spoken of as her dearest memorial, that of a dead sister.

Rayton's little finger was encircled by a curious antique cameo.

They were silent: but the silence to one heart

at least had a delicious meaning. It was broken by a voice close at hand.

"Oh, Mr. Rayton," said a tall cadet, a boy in years, but longing beyond all things to be considered a man—"oh, Mr. Rayton, pray come and try your persuasions with Miss Smythe; she won't touch her guitar for all we can beg and implore. But every one says a word from you will be sufficient."

"Really they do me honour," replied Rayton, hesitating, and not at all grateful for having his *tête-à-tête* broken.

"Pray go," said Helen, with a beautiful smile; for she was one of those women as incapable of feeling mean petty jealousy, as she was of herself giving cause for it.

He went; and the sullen beauty relented at what were, after all, but commonplace compliments. She sang several French and Spanish love songs, now archly, now pathetically; and as the evening waned, Rayton found himself drawn into the vortex of frivolity, and lavishing all his *petits soins* on the coquettish Caroline. Helen was not present, either to share his attentions or distract him from them. Fresh from that interview, she could not have joined the general society of their fellow-passengers. She lingered for some time on deck, and if—as she leaned her head on her hand, and gazed upon the heaving waters—her reverie had been translated into words, it would have run thus—

"So good—so noble!—so *true*—I am sure.

Oh, that we had met years ago—I could have made him happy, and helped him to be great. Yet now if it were possible”—and she pressed her hands to her side, as if to still her heart’s wild beating, then covered her face with them—“at least it will be happiness enough for me to love him—yet could I endure he should love another?” And, reverie melting into prayer, she ejaculated, “Oh, God, have mercy upon me! the first love of ignorant youth is faint and flickering—now I know that it is the *last* love which is destiny!”

But the breeze had freshened; for long unnoticed by Helen, till she shivered in her light mantle, and then she sought her cabin, and her flushed cheek pressed the pillow, while still the one reverie prevailed—the beautiful reverie of the ideal made palpable—dissolving from time to time, as before, into the devout petition, “Oh, God, have mercy upon me!”

And the breeze still freshened; but those who were wearing away the hours with song, and mirth, and idle speech, heeded it not, and in a few hours even they sought slumber; and all were dreaming, sleeping or waking dreams, save the watchful crew who guarded and guided the floating palace.

But the breeze still freshened; and there were heavings and rollings of the stately vessel, that made rest and slumber difficult, or impossible. And there were noises overhead; and the trampling of many feet, and the hauling of ropes, and the quick com-

mand—sometimes the angry word and muttered imprecation. And behold, when morning dawned, there was a murky sky above, chequered from time to time by the swiftly-driving clouds, that seemed but the servants of the fierce capricious winds. The treacherous ocean, lashed to fury, heaved and foamed in monstrous billows round the devoted ship; and the shrieking cry of the sails, as they split like paper, was scarcely to be distinguished amid the roar of the TEMPEST! Terror and anxiety had set their seal on every countenance; brave men grew pale and silent, and timid women wept and prayed aloud.

Very few were so calm as Helen Seymour; she spoke words of hope and encouragement to the fearful and fainting, exhorted even the rough sailors to do their duty with brave composure, and seemed by her own example to instruct all to meet with resignation the will of Providence, yet to use all human means to avert disaster. A terrible calamity was at hand; the skilful captain and two men at his side were swept by one huge and sudden wave into the surging waters. In a desperate attempt to rescue them, a boat and more lives were lost. For awhile the very will of those who were next in command seemed paralysed, and confusion reigned. It was during this time that Helen applied herself to assuaging the sufferings of a poor woman who had been injured by the fall of a mast, rending her own dress to bind up the bleeding arm.

Francis Rayton gazed at her from time to time, and spoke to her occasionally; but mingling with his admiration a feeling almost of awe crept over him. She seemed something above himself—even beyond his comprehension; yet ever as her eyes met his, there was a light of faith, and trust, and almost gladness shone from them, which was more divine than that of any earthly hope.

Lawson and his wife sat hand in hand; at intervals large silent tears rolled down poor Fanny's cheeks, which more than once he kissed or wiped away; and he had wound a large scarf around her in such a manner that it supported the infant in her arms, and held it inextricably there. Caroline Smythe had been of the crouching, weeping party, though possibly too ignorant to be really conscious of their absolute peril; and sometimes she appealed to Rayton, as if his word were a fiat, or clung to his arm as if there dwelt protection.

One disaster followed another, till the Falcon, like some noble animal maimed and shorn of its limbs, lay almost a helpless log upon the waters; and soon the catastrophe dreaded from the first was fatally realised. The ship struck upon the rocks, and the only hope of dear life rested with the boats. The crash of noises, cries, and prayers, and bursts of passionate agony, made up a scene of terror such as sharers or witnesses have often attempted to describe.

"Quick—quick, Miss Seymour!" said Rayton,

approaching Helen and taking her by the arm ; "there is not a moment to be lost ! Think not of property ; let us save only ourselves."

"Let me," replied Helen (*as*, she was nearly saying), "wait for the second boat. I can be of use here."

And she spoke truly ; she was of that great use which a calm and superior mind always is in swaying inferior natures. She was exhorting to composure and cheering with hopeful words a party of steerage passengers, who but for this influence might have added to the struggle and confusion around. At this moment, wild with terror, yet looking very beautiful nevertheless, Caroline Smythe rushed towards Mr. Rayton, and sank almost fainting into his outstretched arms. The profusion of her rich dark hair, which curled in natural ringlets, fell over his shoulder, and, borne by the tempest-blast, streamed across his face. Helen Seymour looked up, but she met not his gaze ; Rayton's eyes were fixed on the chiselled features of the death-like countenance that almost touched his cheek. "Speed—speed !" was the cry on every side ; and, swayed by the "impulse of the moment," Francis Rayton placed Caroline in the boat, and, yielding to her murmured persuasion, stayed beside her !

Now seemingly engulfed in the waters, then rising on the crest of a foaming billow, the first boat sped on towards the shore, while the second was rapidly filling with half-desperate fugitives. There was a general cry that the women should be saved first.

"My love! my life;" exclaimed Fanny Lawson, clinging to her husband with passionate agony; "swear to me that we shall not be parted! Swear that you will not urge me to enter the boat if there be not room for both!"

But for only answer, while he supported her with one arm, he pressed the other hand to his eyes, as if he dared not look upon her. "Come—come," said a sailor, attempting to lead her away; but Fanny had fainted, and Lawson, taking her in his arms as if she had been a child, pressed a frantic kiss upon her motionless lips, and bore her away towards the boat. Like a bale of merchandise was she passed from hand to hand, while Lawson flung himself upon the deck of the fast-filling ship, in the utter prostration of his agony. A sailor was assisting Helen Seymour to step across masses of cordage and fragments of various kinds; her countenance was of a death-like paleness, and her lips were compressed by some firm determination; yet even in this hour of life and death she stooped to pick up an object which had rolled towards her feet; it was Francis Rayton's cameo ring, which must have dropped from his finger.

"Lawson!—come—quickly," said Helen, speaking rapidly, yet with wonderful calmness. Then, as they approached the edge of the vessel, and addressing the crew, who were only waiting for her, she continued: "I yield my place to James Lawson;—let not two loving hearts be parted."

There was a hush of wonder and admiration, even amid the terror of the moment; but events might have changed their course had not Fanny recovered her senses, and seeing only that her husband hesitated joining the fugitives, without comprehending why, she stepped on the edge of the boat with the gesture of one who would fling herself from it. By an instinct rather than a process of reasoning, her husband stretched towards her, and, falling back, she drew him after her.

"Do not grieve for me," said Helen Seymour, as the boat was loosened from the wreck, and—for the tempest had lulled—her clear tones were heard distinctly. "Do not grieve—there is still a chance of rescue for me; but if I die, I do so willingly. Yesterday life was precious—to-day it is valueless.

Alas! the one remaining chance was desperate; as, indeed, her generous heart foreboded. The last and smallest boat was not sea-worthy; it filled and went down even in the attempt to launch it. Some three or four sailors still remained on the wreck, and warmed to self-sacrifice by Helen's example, they tried to construct a raft for her security, but materials were wanting, and with blank countenances, they gave up the attempt in despair. "Waste not time and strength for me, my friends," said Helen, in a clear low tone; "you are strong swimmers, and have a chance of life. For me it is the death hour; and though death comes with few terrors, I would meet it alone—in silent, prayerful thought. It is

sweet to know the father is not torn from wife and child—three human beings made happy.” And while she spoke, she wreathed one arm round so much of the shivered mast as remained, as if she had taken her final stand in the sinking ship. One of the sailors clung to her hand, and kissed it, swearing it were best to die with her, and seek her angel intercession at the gates of heaven; and another implored her to trust to his strong arm, that should struggle with her towards the shore.

“No life shall be risked in saving mine,” she said, firmly; and indeed the few minutes which had remained for parley were soon over, and as each, by the strong instinct of self-preservation, sought some stay among the floating spars, the last object they beheld was Helen’s white dress and upturned countenance, as she sank without a struggle in the deep waters.

No matter how the boats careered landward, and the strong swimmers reached the shore with life—a trembling, grateful band uplifted their souls in praise and thanksgiving.

Helen’s corpse was washed to the beach by the flow of the tide; that form which had enshrined, perhaps, a greater heart than dwelt among the rescued. Her action—her words had been repeated from mouth to mouth; and many were the tears shed around her—many the kisses pressed upon her pale cheek and brow. Fanny Lawson flung herself beside the body in an attitude of worship; and her

husband's lip quivered with manly emotion. Even the child was made to kiss the dead, and a strange hope indulged that it might remember the scene. Francis Rayton had requested that he might look upon her remains—alone.

He entered the shaded chamber, where she lay in white garments, her rich light hair, still dank from the ocean baptism, parted from the forehead, and reaching in long lines below her waist. Her countenance bore an expression of angelic serenity; and she looked young—oh, so much younger than when swayed by the hopes and the fears, and the passions of life! On her finger still rested the emerald ring, but next to her hand, and guarded *by* that precious memento, was Rayton's cameo, evidently in the death hour yet more dearly cherished. Rayton had not shed tears since boyhood, but as he gazed he burst into a passion of weeping; then, when something like calmness was restored, he drew away the emerald, and placed it on his own finger. To the authorities he intimated that he would pay to her representatives any price which might be set upon it; and requested that the cameo might not be removed from the dead. No one disputed his right to direct; and by his order a monument of white marble has been erected above her African grave, bearing the simple inscription:

“TO THE MEMORY OF A MOST NOBLE WOMAN.”

Rayton did not proceed to Calcutta in the same vessel which conveyed the remainder of the passengers ; it would seem, indeed, that he purposely avoided their companionship. He returned to England as speedily as possible ; is still unmarried—immersed in politics and speculations. Once, when a most dear friend questioned him on his mode of life, he answered bitterly, quoting a line from Tennyson's passion-kindled poem :—

“‘ I myself must mix with action, lest I wither with
despair !’ ”



THE TEMPTERS AND THE TEMPTED.

CHAPTER I.

"The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?"

SHAKSPEARE. *Measure for Measure.*

It was an exceedingly comfortable dining-room, in an exceedingly comfortable house. The month was January, and the air was so clear and frosty, that every step which passed seemed to ring upon the pavement. Thick warm curtains, however, excluded all draught, and the brightest of fires blazed in the polished grate; while the clear light of a pendent lamp shone upon the dessert of chestnuts, in their snowy napkin, and golden oranges. Amber and ruby-tinted wines sparkled through the rich glass which held them; but the "comfortable" party were only a trio—Mr. and Mrs. Dixon, and their son. They were people whom the world had used very kindly, who had never had a real trouble in their lives. No doubt they had imagined a few; and imaginary sorrows differ from real ones, I believe, chiefly in this—that they teach nothing, unless,

indeed, their indulgence teach and strengthen selfishness.

Mr. Dixon was a fine-looking man, of about fifty, with rather a pleasing expression of countenance. He was often visited by good, kind impulses, but a certain indecision of character had made him fall under the rule of his partner early in their married life; and the instances, during twenty-five years, in which his best inclinations had been checked, were beyond all numbering. The lady, who was about five years his junior, bore every trace of having been a pretty woman, though on the *petite* scale. Yet there were people who did not like her face; and certainly, bright as her eyes were, they put you in mind of March sunshine, with an east wind blowing all the time. Her lips were thin, and she had a trick of smiling, and showing her white teeth very often, even when she said the most disagreeable things. Richard Dixon, the son, bore a strong resemblance to his mother; though, if the mouth were indicative of rather more sentiment than she possessed, it also betrayed more sensuality.

"This is a very serious charge, my dear," said Mr. Dixon, putting down the glass he had raised half-way to his lips; "are you sure there is no mistake?"

"Quite sure," replied the lady—"quite certain Mary must have taken it. I put the piece of lace at the top of the drawer, and the key was never out of my possession, except when I entrusted it to her."

"We never had a servant I should so little have suspected," returned Mr. Dixon.

"Nor I either," said the son; "and she is, out and out, the best housemaid we ever had—at least, the best that ever has been willing to stay."

Truth always hits hard, and the colour rose to Mrs. Dixon's cheek. She was one of those ladies who cannot "keep their servants." "Then bad is the best, I am sure," she exclaimed angrily; "and for my part I am very glad she is going."

"And I am very sorry," said her husband. "But why did you not tell me a month ago that you had given her warning, instead of leaving it in this way to the last moment?"

"Really I cannot see, Mr. Dixon, what you have to do with these arrangements. I mention the circumstance now, because the girl is leaving to-night, and because you will see a strange face to-morrow, and would wish to know all about it."

"But what did she say when you accused her of theft?"

"Accused her! You don't suppose I should have done such a foolish thing. A pretty scene there would have been. I know the fact, and that is enough: you don't believe I should have got back the lace, do you?"

"But justice, my dear, justice; surely you should tell her your suspicions."

"Oh! now that I have engaged another servant—now that she is going, you can tell her if you

like. But I don't see myself what use it is. She is sure to deny it, and then there will be a scene—and I hate scenes as much as you do."

At that moment there was a slight tap at the parlour-door, and, obedient to the "come in" of Mr. Dixon, the discarded Mary entered. She was a gentle-looking girl, of about twenty, attired in a dark cloak and straw bonnet. She came to take a dutiful leave of the family, and to ask a question; which latter natural proceeding seemed not to have occurred to the party before. In engaging herself with any future mistress, and referring to Mrs. Dixon for a "character," what was she to give as the reason that she was discharged?

So innocent, so interesting did Mary look—the tears just starting to her eyes at the thought of leaving the home of many months, and her cheek slightly flushed—that neither of the gentlemen could believe her guilty. But Mrs. Dixon was in the habit of engaging and discharging about a dozen servants a-year, of one sort or another, and was quite hardened against "appearances."

Mr. Dixon evaded an immediate answer to Mary's question, by asking her whither she was going?

"I am going into a lodging, sir."

"That is a pity: have you no friends to stay with?"

"My friends are all in Wiltshire," said the girl, with a sigh; "and besides that it would cost me a great deal of money to go to them, I would rather look out for a place than make a holiday."

"Your wages, which I sent down to you, were quite right, I believe?" said Mrs. Dixon, with an icy dignity that was intended to close the conference.

"Quite right, thank you, ma'am," replied Mary, with a curtsey; "but if you please, when I go after a place what shall I say was the reason you discharged me?"

"I should think your own conscience must tell you," replied the lady, smoothing her braided hair with her hand, as she had a trick of doing when she was growing angry. Poor Mary turned pale at these words, indefinite as they were, and could hardly murmur—"Tell me, oh! tell me, what is it I have done?"

Her change of colour was to Mrs. Dixon evidence of guilt; and with a sort of horrible satisfaction at this proof (to her) that she was right, the lady charged the poor girl with the theft which she had just mentioned to her husband. It was, indeed, a scene which followed—a very piteous one. Mary uttered but a few words of brief and emphatic denial—far removed from the loud asseverations which the guilty can sometimes deliver. Tears seemed driven back to her heart; and as she stood for a moment with clasped hands and rigid features, she looked like a statue of woe. Richard Dixon was by no means unmoved. He had his own reasons for believing her a girl of good principles. Like many other—more thoughtless, perhaps, than heartless—young men, he never disguised his admiration of beauty to the

object, even if the revealing it bordered on insult. And he remembered that Mary had always received his idle compliments with a dignity that repelled further rudeness, and with a deportment that he should have admired in a sister. He placed a chair near Mary, and begged her to be seated ; but absorbed in her own misery, she took no notice of the attention. Meanwhile, Mr. Dixon had poured out a glass of wine, and offered it to her, exclaiming—"I must hope there is some mistake. I cannot believe this of you."

The word and act of kindness seemed to melt the statue, and she burst into tears. But Mrs. Dixon felt this would never do. It was time now for her to play a more interesting part in the drama, and applying her filmy, lace-bordered handkerchief to her eyes, she leaned back in her chair, and sobbed out reproaches to her husband for his cruelty in doubting her word. Poor man! what could he think—what could he do? Chiefly, I believe, he resolved never—never again—to interfere between two of womankind; and hurrying poor Mary to the hall-door, where a cab and her boxes awaited her, he put a sovereign into her hand, as a remembrance of her kind attention to the buttons of his shirts, and such *et cetera*. The gold dropped from her grasp, as she exclaimed—"No, sir—my character! my character!"

Mr. Dixon stooped for the money, and pressed it upon her again—till, trusting to his assurances that

he did not believe her guilty, and that he would see her righted, she consented to accept it.

It is a subject of painful interest to ask how the hundreds and thousands of female servants "out of place" in this palpitating heart—this Great Metropolis—contrive to exist for weeks, and even months together, as they do, upon the scanty savings from their scanty wages? And plain as the duty is of employers not to deceive one another by giving an unjust character of a servant, or hiding glaring faults, there is a terrible responsibility in depriving a young woman of a situation, which is not, I fear, generally sufficiently felt. It seems too often forgotten that servants have peculiarities of temper and disposition as well as their mistresses, and that she who would not suit one family might be admirably adapted to please another. Surely, it is the most truthful, as well as the most humane plan, in a mistress, to allude only to the moral attributes of character; judging charitably—if there be no knowledge darker than doubt—of the general acquirements. Sensible people may commonly get on well with servants who speak the truth, and have a tolerable share of brains: so much that is valuable must follow in the wake. If one cannot have both—truth is even more precious than sense. What was poor Mary to do, robbed of her character for honesty?

A day or two after her dismissal she called upon Mrs. Dixon, re-asserting her innocence, and implor-

ing her mistress to give her such a character as would procure her a situation. But the mistress was firm in her resolve to tell the circumstance to any lady who might call just as it had occurred. It would be tedious to narrate the trials of the friendless girl. How one stranger would have received her into her house, but for this unfortunate episode revealed by Mrs. Dixon; and how, on Mary defending herself with tears and entreaties, the half-convinced lady declared she would have taken her, had Mary told the story *at first*. Prompted by this assertion, in her next application she confessed the suspicion which attached to her; but there is a very strong *esprit de corps* among mistresses, and they very seldom think each other wrong. The lady could not fancy Mrs. Dixon had been mistaken. It was after these sorrows that the thought occurred to her of applying to the mistress with whom she had lived previously to her service with Mrs. Dixon, and who had discharged her only in consequence of reducing her establishment. Alas! she had left the neighbourhood, to reside near a married daughter; but, as they had paid every bill with scrupulous exactness, not one of the tradespeople could tell her whither they had gone. The nearest intelligence she could gain was—"Somewhere in Kent." Poor Mary!—her last anchor of hope seemed taken from her.

CHAPTER II.

WINTER had given place to Spring; but though the frost no longer bleached the pavement, or crisped all moisture, and though the sun seemed struggling to warm the atmosphere, there was a cold wind which would have rendered warm garments very acceptable, and which blew through the thin shawl of a young girl, as she stood at the corner of a street, talking to a friend a few years older than herself. The latter appeared more a favourite of fortune than poor Mary, for she was the shivering girl. Now *millionaires* can afford to dress in rusty black, and a great many of the sterner sex are either careless to slovenliness about their equipments, or disfigure themselves by a horrible taste; but it may be taken as a general rule, subject to but few exceptions, that women—especially young and pretty ones—dress as well as their means will permit. Hence the warmer, richer clothing of Mary's companion proclaimed her better off in the world.

"It must come to that, or worse," said Mary, with a shudder; and the tears stood in her eyes, which shone with that strange glassy lustre that often accompanies, perhaps reveals, intense mental suffering. "After all, as you say," she continued,

"it would not be a false character, for I never wronged any one of a farthing's worth in my life. If it could be managed—if I could but get a place!"

"Oh! it can be managed—never fear. Do you suppose that I could not act the fine lady, when I have acted at a real theatre for three seasons, and done much harder things, I can tell you? I don't say but what I shall expect you to do me a good turn some of these days, if I should want it."

"What can I ever do for you?" exclaimed Mary—"you who are so much above me!"

Poor Mary! how sadly had her heart been warped by temptation! how sadly must her self-respect have been lowered before she could have formed such an estimate of herself—fallen, or falling as she already was! Perhaps it were best not to inquire what were the probable services this unprincipled woman expected in return for giving the false character. It is hardly to be supposed that she had sought the acquaintance of the friendless girl without some selfish plan or motive. They stood talking a few minutes longer, and then walked away in different directions—the elder with the confident air of one who had carried herself successfully through many schemes of deception; the other trembling and abashed at the first breaking down of the barriers of integrity. Oh! ye thoughtless women in your homes of ease—ye whose breath can give or take away reputation—be merciful in your judgment

of her, and pause well ere, on some similar occasion, you drive a helpless female to desperation !

“ Oh ! it was pitiful,
Near a whole city full,
Friend she had none.”

Mary had no longer the means of returning to her family in Wiltshire ; she was already reduced to poverty's sad extremity, and had that very morning conveyed her warm cloak to the safe keeping of the pawnbroker. Besides, how could she have borne to go as a disgraced pauper among the large poor family to which she belonged—among those who had looked with such pride upon their “ sister in service in London ? ”

And yet, notwithstanding her many griefs, and the gaunt figure of absolute want which loomed upon her, and was drawing nearer and nearer, she had refused assistance only the day before from her “ young master,” whom she had chanced to meet in the street, and who had accosted her, apparently with much sympathy. From him she had learned that Mrs. Dixon was as implacable as ever ; yet, though he pressed silver and even gold upon her, let us be thankful she was still hedged round by the feelings of delicacy and feminine propriety which forbade her accepting money from “ an admirer.” Surely the world-hardened tempters do not always know the dreadful work they are about.

“ If you please, ma'am, do you know of a place ? ” was the inquiry of Mary, about an hour after she

had parted with her new acquaintance. She had entered a respectable-looking baker's shop, in one of the great thoroughfares.

"What sort of a place?" said the mistress, a good-tempered, good-looking young woman of seven or eight and twenty, who was just then sweeping the counter with a hand-brush, with great activity. Mary, by the way, had observed at a glance that shop, and counter, and hand-brush, and all appurtenances, were what everything belonging to a baker's shop should be, exquisitely clean and neat; and that the mistress herself, in her snowy cap and light-coloured cotton dress, was a pattern of neatness.

"I could take a housemaid's place, ma'am," replied Mary, "or servant of all-work in a small family."

"Lor! I wonder if you will suit us?" said Mrs. Allen, the baker's wife; "we sent off our servant in a great huff last night, and I have no one to do a stroke for me, except the nurse-girl, and she has enough to do with three children to mind. Could you come directly—to-day, I mean?"

"Yes, ma'am, to-day, if you like."

Then followed the ordinary questions, and, of course, among them—"Where did you live last?"

"*With Mrs. Bell, ma'am, No. 20, — street.*"
Alas, alas, poor Mary!

"And can you have a good character?"

"I am sure I can, ma'am. I only left because

Captain Bell was obliged to go with his ship, and Mrs. Bell did not want two servants any longer."

"Well, wait here in the shop a minute, while I go and speak to my husband. James, James," she continued, calling from some stairs which led to the bakehouse, "I want you." And up there came a portly-looking man, with shirt-sleeves tucked up, and his arms covered above the elbows with flour and dough. The Allens were a happy couple, well to do in the world, and in good humour with it and themselves. An attentive listener might have heard something about "tidy-looking girl: think she'd just do: but here it's Friday: I am sure I never can get out for her character either to-day or to-morrow."

"That's a pity," said the husband.

"If we could but be sure of her honesty, I wouldn't mind taking her, and then going for her character next week. What do you say, James?"

"My dear, how can we be sure?"

"She wouldn't be so stupid to say she could have a good character if she were not honest," replied the wife, whose mind seemed veering very much towards trying her.

"That's true," exclaimed the baker, as if a new light were let in on the subject.

"Come and see her," said the wife.

There were two or three customers waiting in the shop, but during Mrs. Allen's short absence, her second child, a little girl of about three years old, had "made friends" with Mary, and was clinging to

her hand, and looking up in her face, as if she were an old acquaintance. It may be that this was the feather, which pleased the parents, and turned the scale.

The feelings with which Mary learned that she was to be received in this unusual manner, and that the falsehood which was planned would not be acted for three days to come, at least, were something like those we may imagine a culprit to entertain, when he receives a respite of his sentence. A dim hope would make itself felt, a dim hope that something would occur to prevent it being carried into execution.

With what wonderful activity Mary set to work, or how anxiously she strove to please, words cannot easily tell. But the lie was a haunting presence that seemed to banish even the hope of happiness. The honest baker and his wife were evidently well satisfied with their new servant. The advantage by which she had profited of living in a family belonging to a higher station, enabled her to do many things in a superior way, and the Allens were people to appreciate all this. And the neat and nice manner in which she served the Sunday's dinner, of which a couple of friends partook, was duly commented on. Then the children "took to her" amazingly, and the circumstance of her discovering a half sovereign which had strangely escaped from the till, seemed to give them the most perfect confidence in her honesty; so that, when on the afternoon of Tuesday, the appointment having been duly made with the fictitious Mrs. Bell, Mrs. Allen was equipped in a

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handsome silk dress, ready to go "after Mary's character," she almost felt that it was a mere form, so certain was she of the girl's acquirements and integrity.

This was a dreadful moment to Mary. She felt as if her quickly-beating heart sent the blood to the crown of her head, and that the next instant it receded, and left her ready to faint, while all the events of her troubled career rushed in strange distinctness before her, even to the history she had learned of the baker's former servant having been discharged for telling a falsehood. But then he had said—"We would have forgiven her if she had not persisted in it!"

By an uncontrollable impulse, as Mrs. Allen was leaving her parlour, Mary seized the skirt of her dress, and throwing herself on her knees before her, exclaimed amid a passionate torrent of tears—"It is *your goodness that has saved me!* oh, hear me, hear me!" And then, in broken phrases, she poured out the story of her trials and temptations.

Sad was it to see the altered looks of her benefactors, and to hear the cold and mournful tone in which Mrs. Allen said—"So you have deceived me after all: you would have cheated me with a false character:" and the good and naturally kind-hearted woman sank on her chair, overcome with the surprise.

"We cannot keep you," said the baker sternly.

"Mercy—mercy!" exclaimed the poor girl, and

weak from recent scanty fare, for she had been too wretched to eat during even the few days that abundance had been before her, she fainted outright. When she came to herself she was stretched on a sofa, with master and mistress both leaning over her. There was pity on their faces, and tears rolled down Mrs. Allen's cheeks. In loosening her dress, in their endeavours to restore her, they had come upon a packet of pawnbroker's duplicates, the dates of which, and the nature of the articles pledged, were a touching confirmation of her story. From the "cornelian brooch," so easily dispensed with, to the necessary cloak, and a prayer-book, the mournful chain was complete.

"We will not turn you away," said the baker, "just yet: we will try you a little longer."

"Your goodness has saved me!" was all the stricken girl could utter.

"But," continued he, "my wife will go immediately to your real mistress, and hear her version of the story. Certainly your confession is voluntary, and I do not believe you are hardened in deception."

Mrs. Allen set off, and the distance being considerable, she was gone upwards of two hours. What an eternity they seemed to the poor servant!

"Well, my dear," exclaimed the baker, when at last she returned, "what do you think?"

"Why, I think, James, that a great many people who call themselves ladies are no ladies at all. Would you believe it, this Mrs. Dixon has found the

piece of lace she accused the girl of stealing—found it slipped behind the drawer, or something of the sort: and except for her own regret at sending away a good servant, I don't think she feels her wickedness at all. Poor girl, I cannot help pitying her. It was very wrong to attempt to cheat us with a false character, but it's my belief we none of us know what we should do if we were sorely tempted. And besides, you see she was not equal to carrying out the deception."

"Let us keep her," was the baker's emphatic rejoinder.

"Why, I don't know that we can," said Mrs. Allen. "Mrs. Dixon says she'll take her back, if she likes to go, for the lady has had three housemaids since she left, and you know it is a much grander place than ours. At any rate, she promises to give her an excellent character."

"Did you tell this Mrs. Dixon about the intended false character?"

"No, I didn't; for I soon found out how matters were, and I felt I should have been wicked to do the girl a further mischief."

"Quite right, my love," said the baker.

Mary was called in, and the facts related. With tearful joy, and amid thanksgiving to Heaven, she implored that her benefactors would allow her to stay with them, rejecting, with something like scorn, the idea of a "grander" place. Faithfully has she now served them for years; and, promoted to the

dignity of shopwoman, she is looked upon rather as a tried friend than anything else. But even in the sunshine of happiness she never forgets that it is the "goodness," as she calls it, of the baker and his wife which has saved her.

" Alas, for the rarity
Of Christian charity! "

How often would a generous trust save the sorely
Tempted!

THE END.

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